



Tasmanian Government Response to the

Legislative Council

**Government Administration
Committee “A”**

**Sub-Committee Report on Rural Health
Services in Tasmania**



Introduction

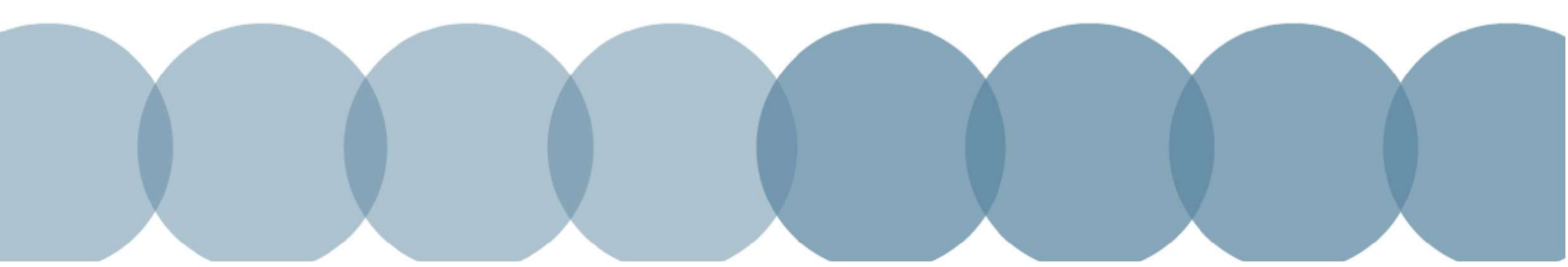
The Tasmanian Government welcomes the release of the Final Report of the Legislative Council's inquiry into rural health services in Tasmania (the Inquiry). This paper constitutes the Tasmanian Government's response to the recommendations contained in the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee "A" Sub-Committee Report on Rural Health Services in Tasmania (the Report).


The Inquiry's findings reaffirm the Tasmanian Government's understanding of the challenges faced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, including poor health outcomes and lower access to services compared with people living in suburban and metropolitan areas. These challenges are not unique to Tasmania; across Australia delivery of services in many rural and remote areas can be challenging due to a combination of issues such as low population numbers, low population density, population profile and challenges in recruiting and retaining health workforce in rural and remote areas.

The Tasmanian Government is committed to progressing reforms to improve health outcomes and access to services for Tasmanians living in rural and remote areas of the State. Since providing its submission to the Inquiry in August 2021, the Tasmanian Government has continued to make vital and significant investments into the health system and progressed a broad range of initiatives to support improved access to health care for people living in rural and remote communities in Tasmania. Many of the Tasmanian Government's existing and planned initiatives align with key focus areas for action identified by the Inquiry including:

- integrated, multi-disciplinary and community-based care models;
- leveraging digital health to increase access to health care;
- working with the Commonwealth Government (the Commonwealth) to progress collaborative and innovative models of care and advocate for more sustainable funding for primary health care; and
- adopting strategies to address workforce shortages and opportunities to fully utilise our health workforce.

The Tasmanian Government broadly supports the Inquiry's 13 recommendations, which align with the Government's strategic vision for the future of Tasmania's health system.

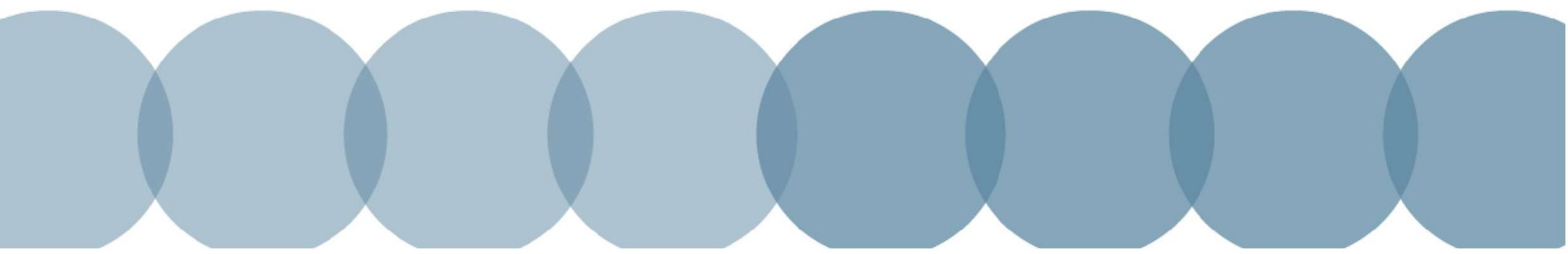





As acknowledged in the Tasmanian Government's submission to the Inquiry, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique and unprecedented challenges for health systems across Australia and globally. The Tasmanian Government has worked proactively and decisively in responding to the pandemic while also ensuring we deliver the changes needed to build a sustainable and effective health system for the Tasmanian community. Some highlights since the submission was made to the Inquiry include:

- the release of *Health Workforce 2040* in September 2021, the Tasmanian Government's long-term strategy to shape a health workforce that meets the needs of Tasmanians now and into the future;
- a plan to establish a Tasmanian rural generalist training program with dedicated training positions for rural generalist doctors in the North West;
- the establishment of a new Rural Medical Workforce Centre, dedicated to training rural doctors at the Mersey Community Hospital, to be opened in 2023;
- the release in May 2022 of Tasmania's *Digital Health Transformation – Improving Patient Outcomes 2022 – 2032* strategy that will facilitate greater equity for patients in rural and regional Tasmania;
- supporting local primary health care providers to expand and improve services both during current operating hours and after hours by providing grants of up to \$250 000 per year for up to three years as part of the Tasmanian Government's Primary Care Support Initiative; and
- complementing the Primary Care Support Initiative referenced above, the Tasmanian Government also provides grants through its Hospital Avoidance Co-Investment fund to match private sector investment on a dollar-for-dollar basis to support capital upgrades for General Practice (GPs), pharmacies and primary care providers to improve or expand their facilities to deliver more after-hours services.

The Commonwealth has funding and policy responsibility for primary health care services, delivered through GPs and other private providers. However, the Tasmanian Government recognises all components of our health system are interdependent and have flow-on impacts to others. The Tasmanian Government has publicly affirmed its willingness to work with the Commonwealth to take a collaborative approach to primary care to overcome the siloed, fragmented approach to how primary care is funded and delivered.





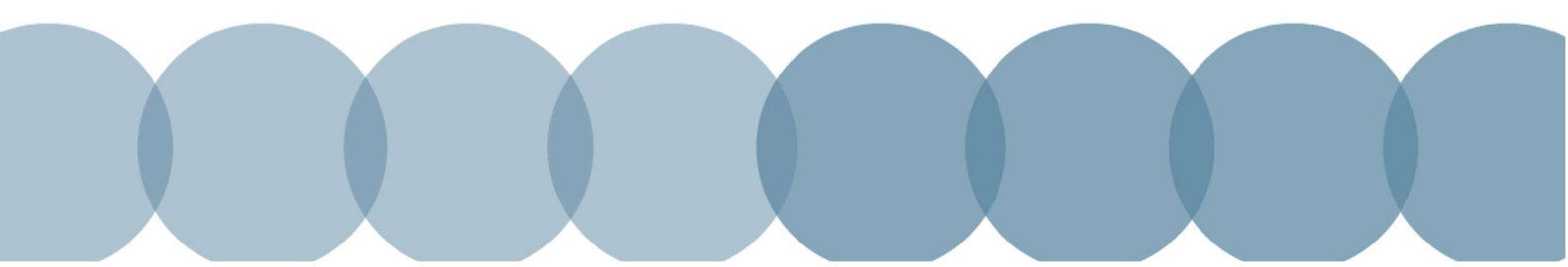
The Tasmanian Government is actively pursuing opportunities to work with the Commonwealth to improve access to primary care for people living in rural areas. An example of this is the Tasmanian Government's trial of a single employer model for rural generalist trainees across the State. The Tasmanian Government also welcomes close collaboration with the Commonwealth as it implements its primary care reforms, including any recommendations made by the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce, to help deliver an integrated health system that delivers better care for patients.

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges that there is more to do, which is why the Government's long-term agenda is critical to building upon the strong progress already made. The Tasmanian Government has set out its long-term vision for Tasmania's health services over the next 20 years in *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* (Advancing Tasmania's Health), released in December 2022. Advancing Tasmania's Health incorporates valuable feedback received from a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public following consultation undertaken throughout 2022.

Several of the strategic ambitions for future health reform set out in Advancing Tasmania's Health have strong alignment with key themes raised in the Final Report. These ambitions focus on strengthening prevention, building the health workforce, partnering with consumers and clinicians, and delivering the health infrastructure (physical and digital) of the future.

The next step in the Our Healthcare Future reform program will be the development of a new long-term plan for the Tasmanian health system to be released in 2023. Addressing the health needs of rural and regional communities will be a key component of this plan.

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges and thanks members of the sub-committee for their report and all those who made submissions or attended hearings in person. The Inquiry's findings and recommendations provide valuable insight as the Tasmanian Government seeks to work collaboratively with the Tasmanian community and other key stakeholders to achieve our vision of a world-class, innovative and integrated health system for all Tasmanians.





Recommendation 1

Adopt a long-term strategy to address the poorer health outcomes experienced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, with a particular focus on:

- a. preventative health and wellbeing;
- b. a person-centred holistic approach;
- c. local community health needs;
- d. intergenerational factors;
- e. removing access barriers;
- f. the delivery of trauma informed care; and monitor, measure and report health outcomes and progress against the strategy.

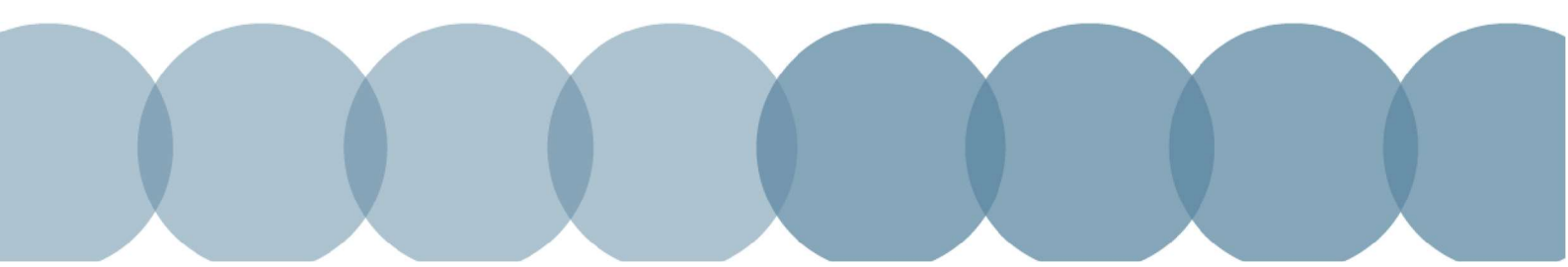
Discussion:


The Tasmanian Government is already progressing planning and initiatives relevant to the focus areas of this recommendation.

In December 2022, the Tasmanian Government released its long-term vision of Tasmanian health services over the next 20 years: *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* (Advancing Tasmania's Health). Advancing Tasmania's Health provides a shared vision and policy direction for a sustainable health system, it includes strategic ambitions that broadly align with the focus of this recommendation, including:

- Better and More Accessible Community Care - Tasmanians will receive healthcare closer to home, in the community, where it is safe and appropriate.
- Strengthening Prevention - Preventive health approaches are embedded across the Tasmanian health system, keeping people healthy and protecting them from harm.
- Partnering with Consumers and Clinicians - Consumers and clinicians work in partnership with service providers to co-design, implement and evaluate the health system, to better meet the needs of Tasmanians.

The next step in the Our Healthcare Future reform program will be the development of a new long-term plan for the Tasmanian Health System (the Long-Term Plan) to be released in 2023. Addressing the health needs of rural and regional communities will be a key component of the Long-Term Plan.





It is anticipated that a key focus of the Long-Term Plan will be to develop a framework for a place-based approach to rural health service planning, implementation and delivery. Application of place-based approaches help to provide health services uniquely tailored to each location's specific circumstances, challenges and opportunities.

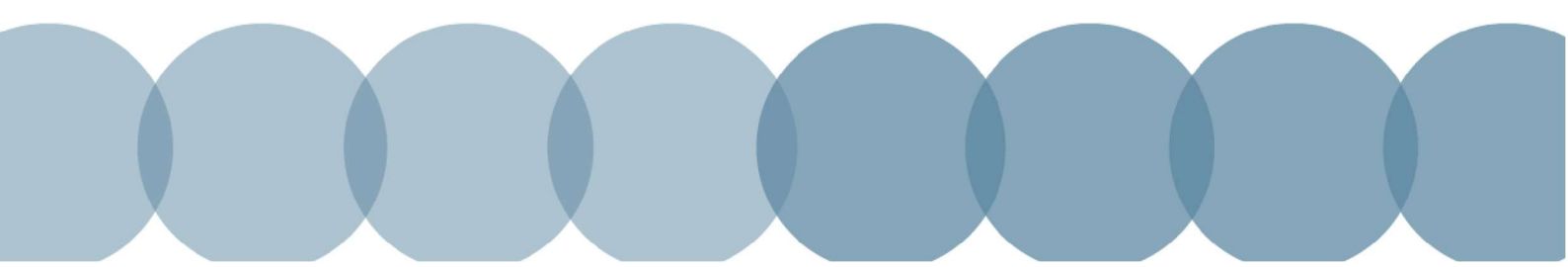
To help improve access to primary care services in rural areas of Tasmania, in November 2022, the Premier and Minister for Health, the Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP wrote to the Federal Minister for Health, the Hon Mark Butler MP, seeking to work together to pilot a statewide single employer model for rural generalist trainees. This model, which is anticipated to commence mid-2023, will allow Tasmania to bridge the gap between GPs and hospitals and improve access to care.

The Tasmanian Government Department of Health (the Department of Health) is already delivering place-based care initiatives to improve access to services and engage communities in rural and regional areas. An example is the trial of Tasmanian Community Health and Wellbeing Networks (networks). The Tasmanian Government has provided \$4.5 million to trial these networks, in partnership with Health Consumers Tasmania. This initiative is targeted at empowering communities to improve their health literacy and awareness, and coordinate place based preventative health initiatives. The first of these networks will be in Ulverstone, Huonville and Scottsdale. The networks build on earlier place-based work funded by the Tasmanian Government.

Preventive health is a key priority for the Tasmanian Government, as demonstrated through the Government's Healthy Tasmania reforms. The latest *Healthy Tasmania Five-Year Strategic Plan 2022-2026* (the Plan), launched in March 2022, has been developed to guide preventive health activity across the whole of government and with communities. This is supported with \$10 million allocated over five years to the Plan and \$8 million over four years to the Health Tasmania Fund grants program.

The Plan builds on the strengths and successes of the initial Healthy Tasmania Five-Year Strategic Plan 2016-2021. The Plan includes a strong focus on actions that support Tasmanians to be more connected in their communities, have positive mental health and wellbeing, limit harmful alcohol use, be smoke free, eat well and live more active lives. The Plan is also focused on bringing together communities, services and all levels of government to work in partnership for improved health and wellbeing.

Government position: Support in-principle





Recommendation 2

Working with the Australian Government, establish collaborative and innovative funding models to meet the specific needs of individuals living in rural and regional areas particularly the:

- a. consideration of a dedicated rural health fund;
- b. active support of multi-disciplinary models of care; and
- c. avoidance of duplication of services and/or costs in areas where health services attract both Tasmanian and Australian Government funding

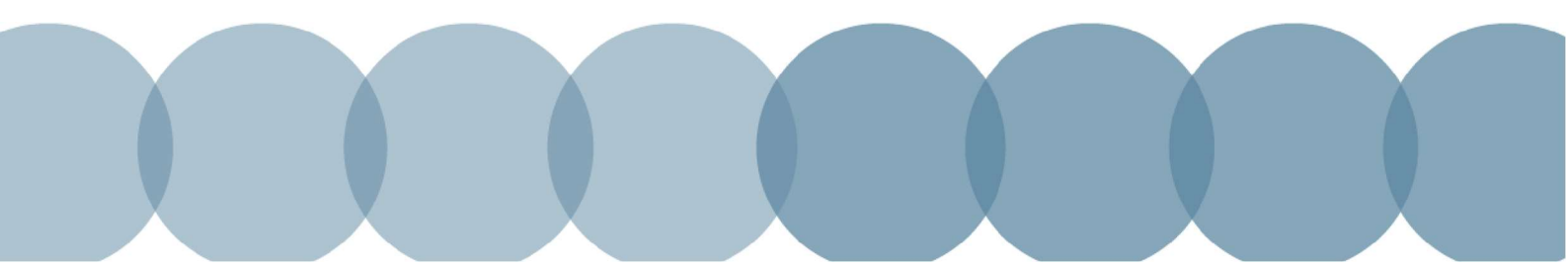
Discussion:


The Tasmanian Government recognises that current national health funding arrangements and split of responsibility between Federal and state governments can be a barrier impacting access to, and delivery of, care in rural and remote areas. The Tasmanian Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth to strengthen sustainable and accessible primary care in rural and regional areas and is doing so in a number of innovative and collaborative ways. Some examples of relevant work are outlined below.

The Tasmanian Government's pilot of a single employer model for rural generalist trainees across Tasmania is a key example of where the Tasmanian Government is seeking to work with the Commonwealth to improve access to health services in rural areas. The Tasmanian Government has also successfully secured a higher portion of funding than per capita as part of the Commonwealth's recently announced Primary Care Pilot fund, with Tasmania set to receive approximately \$8 million from the fund.

The Tasmanian and Commonwealth Departments of Health are holding officer level bilateral discussions on how our two governments can collaborate on joint service planning, including for services within Tasmanian communities in rural and regional areas. The National Health Reform Agreement's long term reform priorities may provide further opportunities for the Tasmanian Government and the Commonwealth to work collaboratively in the future by enabling the trial of joint planning and funding initiatives between different levels of government.

The Tasmanian Government also works collaboratively with the Commonwealth (through Primary Health Tasmania) to avoid duplication of services and costs where health services attract both Tasmanian and Commonwealth funding. This includes outreach services provided through TAZREACH and the Royal Flying Doctors Service.





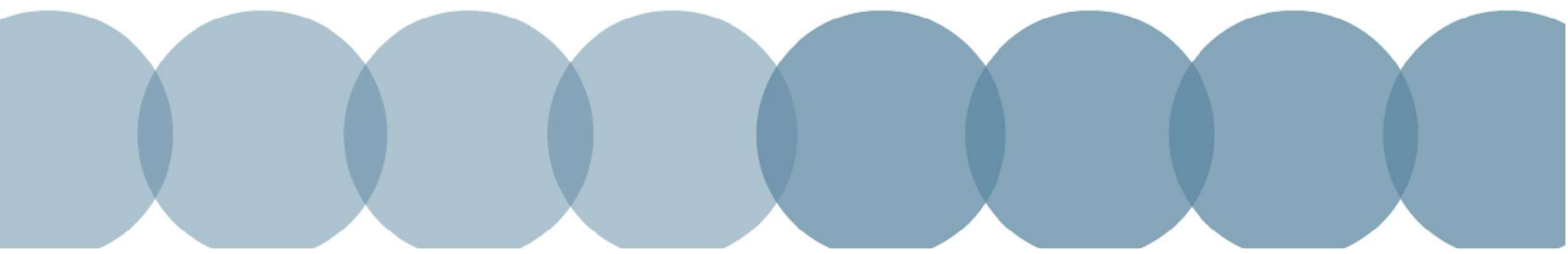
The Tasmanian Government acknowledges and supports the Inquiry's findings on the benefits to patients and providers of collaborative multidisciplinary models of care and is already progressing initiatives with a focus on improving access to high-quality multidisciplinary care.

For example, the Tasmanian Government is currently implementing the MyCARE@Home service to strengthen and better coordinate the delivery of home and community-based services across a range of care areas, including intermediate care, sub-acute care, and hospital in the home. Rather than services operating independently, with their own referral pathway, models of care and independent workforce, home-based services will be brought together under one system of operation.

Through the MyCARE@Home service, care will be provided by a multidisciplinary team working collaboratively to deliver the range of healthcare services needed. The members of the care team will vary according to each patient's needs. Care teams may consist of providers from both primary and hospital care, and from various care organisations.

The Tasmanian Government is also progressing a range of key mental health reforms and initiatives – as part of its overarching *Rethink 2020* mental health plan. These reforms aim to deliver integrated, multidisciplinary mental health care in the community, including in rural and remote areas, including (but not limited to) the Mental Health Hospital in the Home, which has been operational in the south since March 2019.

Government position: Support in Principle





Recommendation 3

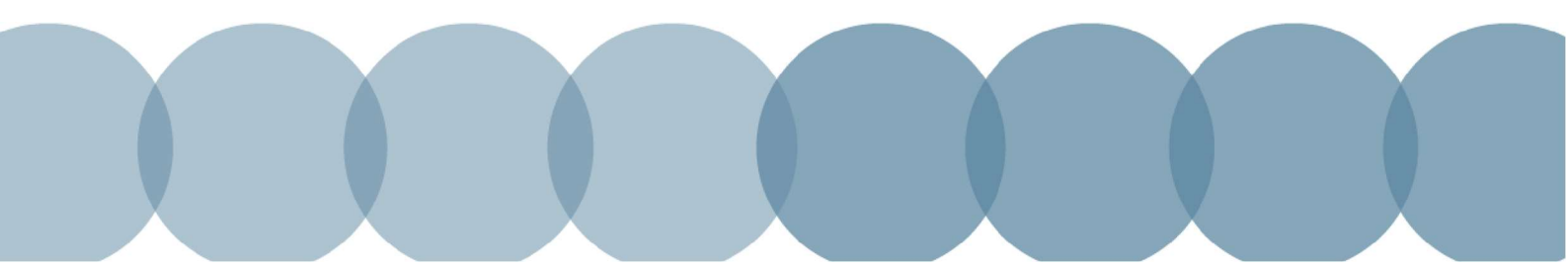
Take an evidence-based approach to identify health care needs in rural and regional Tasmania and strongly advocate for additional Australian Government funding to:


- a. support the delivery of viable primary health services;
- b. deliver community-centred alternative models of health care;
- c. support the recruitment and retention of primary health care providers; and
- d. avoid shifting of costs and responsibility for these services to the Tasmanian Government.

Discussion:

The Tasmanian Government is committed to working collaboratively with the Commonwealth (which holds funding and policy responsibility in this space) to help Tasmanians access timely and sustainable general practice and primary care services. The proposal for a statewide single employer model for rural generalist trainees is a key example of where the Tasmania Government is proactively engaging with the Commonwealth to seek agreement to trial innovative approaches to delivering health care for the benefit of rural and regional Tasmanians. A further example of the Tasmanian Government's advocacy in this space is the securing of approximately \$8 million in funding under the Commonwealth's Primary Care Pilot Fund.

A key focus of the Tasmanian Government's Advancing Tasmania's Health is that planning, provision and evaluation of health care is informed by current best practice evidence and meet the needs identified by communities. Advancing Tasmania's Health is underpinned by six supporting principles, including that the Tasmanian health system will be consumer-centred, collaborative, innovative, integrated, equitable, and evidence-based. The service design to be provided in the Long-Term Plan will be informed by an evidence base gathered from research, demographic data, public health profiles, disease prevalence rates and health service usage statistics. This evidence base will be interpreted in collaboration with consumers, clinicians and other key stakeholders to develop a health system in which system managers, consumers and clinicians work together for optimal outcomes.



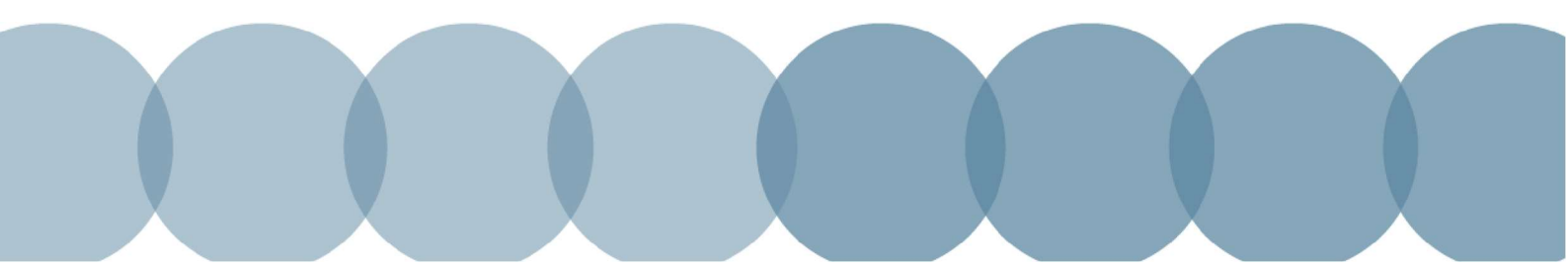



As part of its Long-Term Plan, the Department of Health will work together with its partners to integrate services and systems and improve experiences and outcomes for patients, their families and carers, including those living in rural and remote areas. Strategies to deliver on this objective include implementing alternative models or approaches to health care, such as:

- virtual care
- hospital avoidance programs
- partnering with residential aged care
- building on existing intermediate healthcare services, including Hospital in the Home, Mental Health Hospital in the Home and the Community Rapid Response Service
- ambulance secondary triage services and alternative referral pathways
- hospital in-reach services
- supported discharge
- clinical networks, and
- specialist outreach to primary healthcare.

The Tasmanian Government is also working to support the recruitment and retention of primary health care providers in our rural and regional communities. Rebuilding the rural generalist workforce in rural and remote Tasmania to align the workforce with community health needs is an action of *Health Workforce 2040*. To support this, a Tasmanian rural generalist training program with dedicated training positions for rural generalist doctors is being established in the north-west of the state.

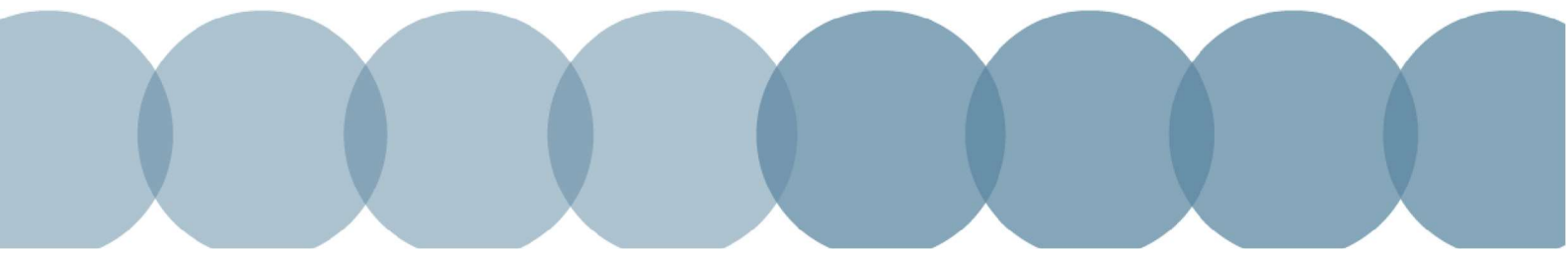
A Rural Medical Workforce Centre, dedicated to training rural doctors, is being established at the Mersey Community Hospital with new facilities to be opened in 2023. It is proposed that in the future this centre be expanded to be a multi-disciplinary Rural Health Workforce Centre, including nursing and allied health training.





As raised in the response to Recommendation I, there is a growing body of evidence supporting place-based approaches to planning and funding health services to amplify locally led models. The Long-Term Plan will support the establishment of these approaches. As the Department of Health implements its Long-Term Plan, it will consider further opportunities to engage with the Commonwealth to jointly fund or trial innovative models of care and funding, including through arrangements for trials provided for under the National Health Reform Agreement.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 4

Monitor, measure and report health outcomes for Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas against the Department of Health Strategic Priorities 2021-23.

Discussion:

The Tasmanian Government Department of Health monitors and reports delivery of the Department of Health Strategic Priorities 2021-23 in its Annual Report.

In addition to this, the Department of Health also publishes performance information relevant to rural and regional Tasmania, including the number of district hospital separations and average occupancy rates. This is included in the State Budget papers each year and in the Department of Health's Annual Report.

With respect to health outcomes for Tasmanians, while the reporting against the strategic priorities does not include health outcomes reporting, the Department of Health does run a *Tasmanian Population Health Survey* (the survey), every three years. The survey collects information to help assess the health of Tasmanians over time and to understand emerging health issues. The most recent survey occurred between September and November 2022 and included questions on causes of ill health, chronic conditions, health behaviours, barriers to access to health care and current health status.

Data analysis is currently underway and a report on the survey is to be published in 2023. As part of that analysis, the Department of Health will consider what information is available in relation to Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, noting there can be challenges drawing conclusions from small population samples

Government position: Support in-principle





Recommendation 5

Adopt a strategic approach to deliver integrated, multi-disciplinary models of care, including mental health services, that:

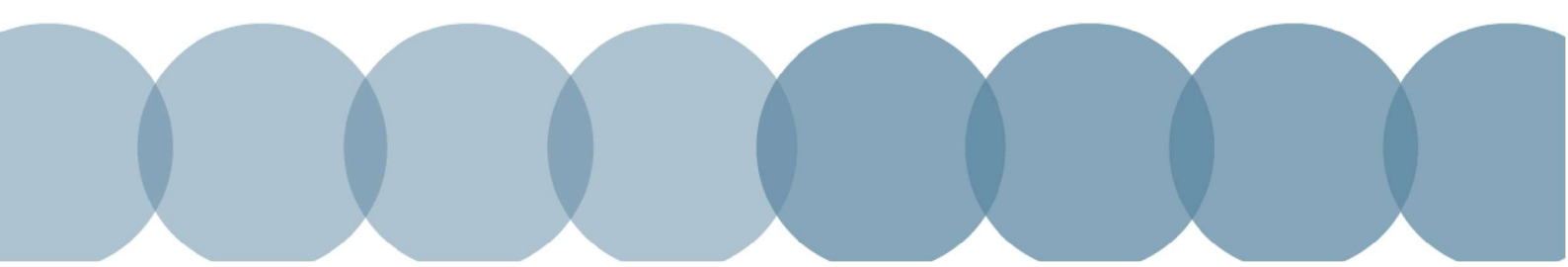
- a. are community-centred and specific;
- b. support health practitioners to work collaboratively;
- c. include the delivery of after-hours care; and
- d. do not rely on fee for service.


Discussion:

This recommendation aligns with the approach the Tasmanian Government is taking through its *Our Healthcare Future* reforms to build a highly integrated and sustainable health system, which includes a strong focus on:

- providing accessible care in alternative settings where appropriate, like the home or community,
- building a skilled health workforce that can work in partnership across all healthcare settings, with the capacity and capability to support the patient journey.
- ensuring communities are aware of and have the tools to access the health resources available in their local area.

The Department of Health has several models of multidisciplinary care either underway or being planned that align with this recommendation, such as:

- the pilot program Healthcare Connect North that will support individuals with complex chronic conditions to receive timely and intensive community-based care. The service will enable high users of hospital care to receive the coordinated and comprehensive care that supports them to remain in the community; and
 - the *Transforming Outpatient Services* strategy – as part of this strategy general practitioners (GPs) with special interests will commence working in outpatient clinics in 2023. This will increase capacity of clinics and enable hospital and primary care providers to work more closely.
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The Tasmanian Government is also progressing a range of key mental health reforms and initiatives, including through its *Rethink 2020* mental health plan. The aim of these reforms is to deliver integrated, multidisciplinary mental health care in the community, including in rural and remote areas. Examples of relevant initiatives include:

- The Mental Health Hospital in the Home (HiTH)

The Mental Health HiTH service has been operational in the south since March 2019. It is a 12-bed service that provides intensive hospital level treatment for people in an acute phase of mental illness, who are able to be safely treated at home and who would otherwise require an admission to hospital.

The Tasmanian Government has committed \$8.5 million to undertake a two-year pilot of a HiTH service in the north-west. This new service will focus on a 16-to-25-year-old or youth cohort and is scheduled to commence in 2023.

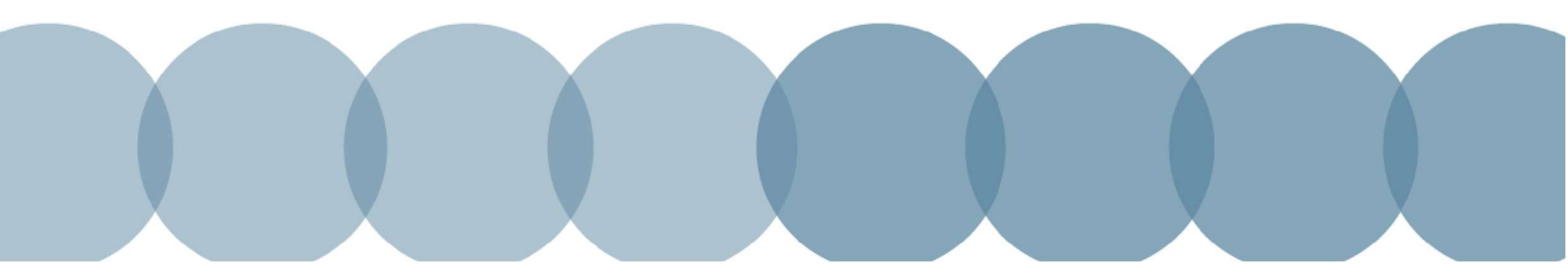
- Transition to the Acute Care Stream and a Continuing Care Stream

Adult Community Mental Health teams in the south are transitioning to an Acute Care Stream and a Continuing Care Stream (CCS). This transition commenced in June 2021 with the formation of a Stage 1 Acute Care Team (ACT) which was fully rolled out in late May 2022.

The ACT is a frontline service which responds to acute, emerging mental health needs in the community. Ensuring the accessibility of the ACT and the timeliness of response are important operational factors in the development of a community-based mental health team, designed to be a safe alternative to emergency department presentation. The CCS is designed to provide specialist case management/care coordination for individuals assessed as requiring an extended period of mental health treatment and care. Funding is provided in the 2022-23 Budget to commence the roll out of the ACT and CCS in the north and north-west.

- The Police Ambulance and Clinician Early Response Service

Another recently established service which can assist people in rural areas to access health services is the Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response (PACER) service. The PACER service provides dedicated rapid, specialist response services, with mental health clinicians attending mental health-related triple-000 call-outs alongside police and paramedics. The PACER service aims to improve access to timely, appropriate, and evidence-based mental health care in the community.





District Hospitals and Community Health Centres

Across Tasmania, there are 13 district hospitals providing a range of inpatient care, residential aged care, primary care and emergency care, for people living in rural and remote communities across the state. The Tasmanian Government also contracts care from a further five privately run rural hospitals.

In addition, there are 23 community-based health centres across the state, the majority of which are in rural and regional areas, that provide or host a selection of community health, primary care and social care services for residents depending on local health care needs.

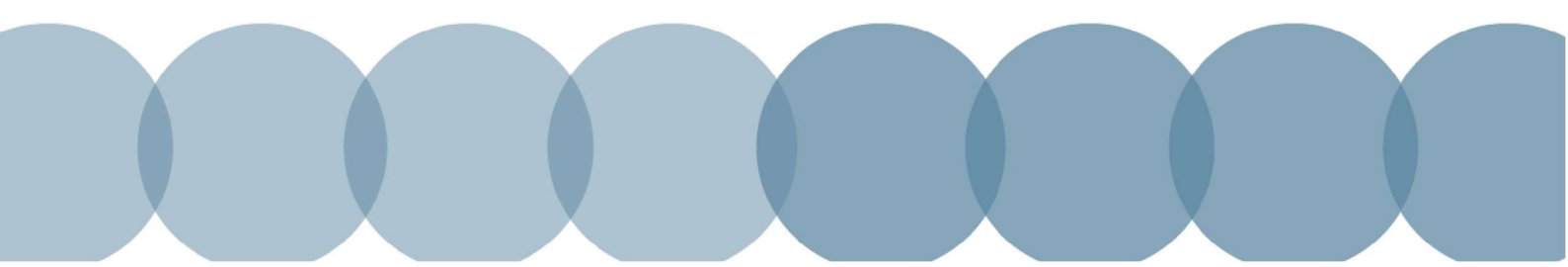
The Tasmanian Government, through its infrastructure and clinical services planning, is taking a strategic approach to maximise and enhance the use of its district hospitals and community health centres and strengthening the available services in those facilities. To support this process, the Department of Health has begun mapping the capacity of its publicly owned rural infrastructure.


Building on this work, rural and remote community health centres and ambulance stations will also be mapped. This will be overlaid with information on non-government healthcare assets and resources available at each location to provide a complete picture of current healthcare capability and capacity across the rural healthcare network.

Support for Primary Health

The Tasmanian Government is also supporting local primary health care providers, including those operating in rural and regional areas, to expand and improve services both during current operating hours and after hours. Grants of up to \$250 000 per year for up to three years are available through the Primary Care Support Initiative for primary health care providers to expand and improve services to vulnerable cohorts and communities. Vulnerable groups targeted by this initiative include (but are not limited to) regional, rural and remote communities and priority population groups such as Aboriginal Tasmanians, LGBTQI+ and culturally and linguistically diverse people.

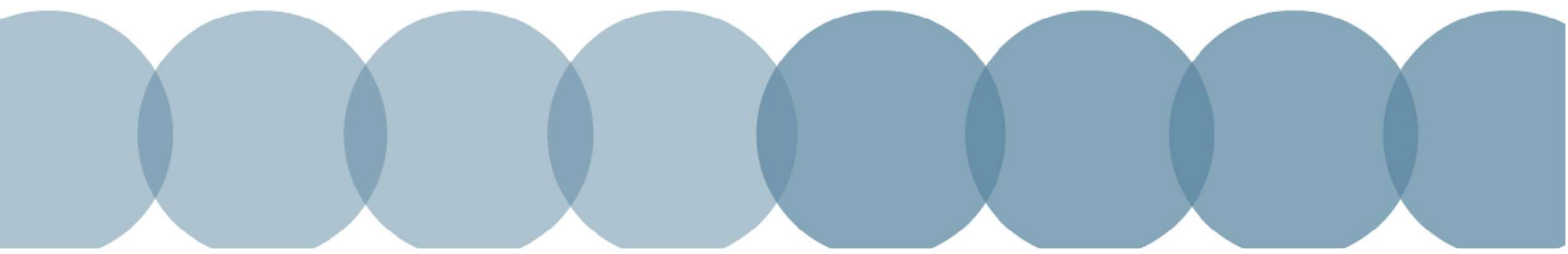
Complementing this initiative, the Tasmanian Government also provides grants through its Hospital Avoidance Co-Investment fund to match private sector investment on a dollar-for-dollar basis to support capital upgrades for GPs, pharmacies and primary care providers to improve or expand their facilities in order to deliver more after-hours services.





To help alleviate pressure on the health system, the Tasmanian Government is also working with the Commonwealth to roll-out its national Urgent Care Clinics (UCCs) initiative, with three Tasmanian clinics to be established at yet to be determined locations. While the service models within the UCCs will depend on what is proposed to be delivered by the successful applicants, the Department of Health is open to innovative partnerships across and between disciplines.

***Government position:* Support**





Recommendation 6

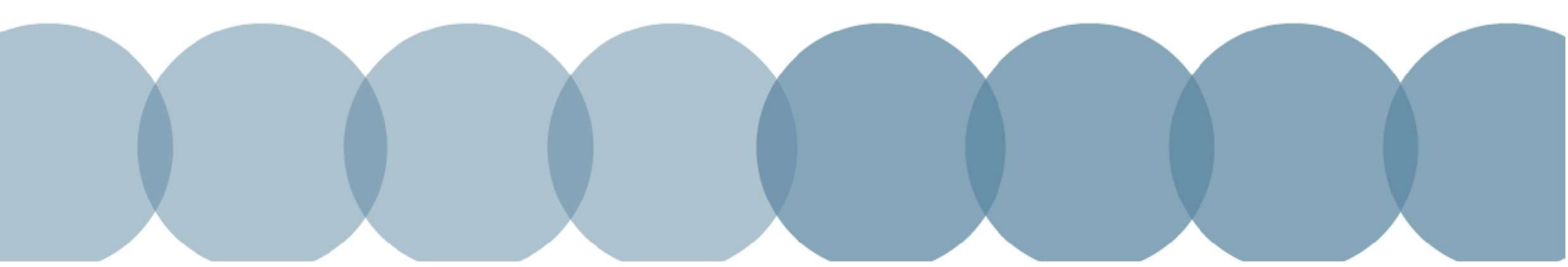
In collaboration with the Australian Government, address barriers preventing the full utilisation of the health workforce, including review of:


- a. relevant legislation;
- b. employment arrangements;
- c. funding arrangements; and
- d. scope of practice for all health professionals, with particular regard to:
 - i. Nurse Practitioners;
 - ii. Rural generalists;
 - iii. Paramedics (including paramedic practitioners); and
 - iv. Pharmacists.

Discussion:

The Tasmanian Government understands the enormous pressure faced by our health care workers in recent years. Health workforce shortages that pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic have been exacerbated by the pandemic, due to factors such as increased demand for, and establishment of, new services (e.g. COVID-19 vaccination, treatment and support services), restrictions on international travel, and furlough of existing health workforce.

The workforce shortages and recruitment challenges highlighted by the Inquiry, and the particular impact this has on health services within rural and regional areas, are issues that are being experienced across Australia. The Tasmanian Government is committed to progressing solutions to help address workforce challenges. There is already a range of existing and planned work at both the local and national levels that align with the focus areas of this recommendation. This work is occurring through a range of mechanisms, with review and analysis into these areas forming part of broader planned and existing work at the state and/or national levels. Accordingly, it is not proposed that a separate review be progressed.





National work

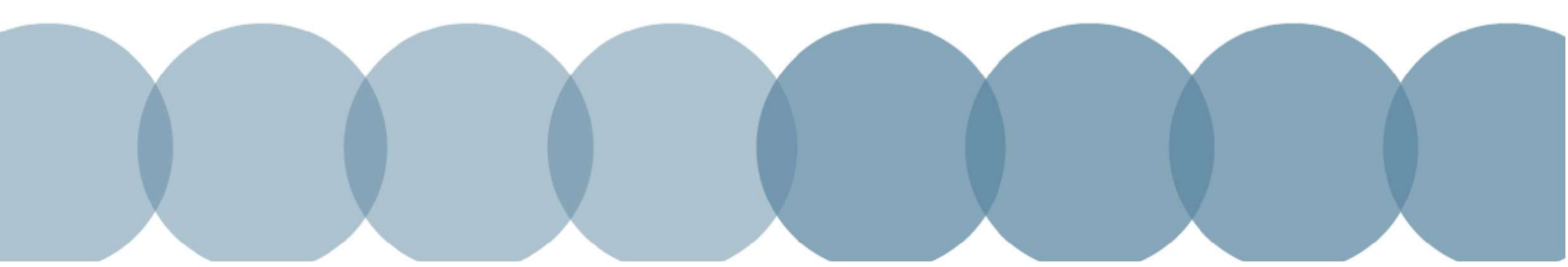
Health workforce is a priority area for all Australian governments and is being jointly considered through both Health Ministers and First Ministers. The Tasmanian Government is actively engaged in these national fora, representing Tasmania's interests. First Ministers, through National Cabinet, recently agreed to progress a suite of projects to streamline and accelerate skills and qualifications recognition for health care professionals, and to a review of regulatory setting for both Australian and overseas training health professions. The Tasmanian Government will continue to engage and represent Tasmania's interests in the relevant national work through National Cabinet and the Health Ministers' Meeting (HMM).


At the national level, Tasmania is participating in collaborative work with the Commonwealth and other states and territories (states) through HMM and its subcommittees to address health workforce shortages. This work includes looking at ways Australian jurisdictions can collectively improve the quantity, distribution (across specialisations and geographical locations, including regional, rural, remote and high need areas), training and support for our healthcare workers. This work includes addressing barriers preventing the full utilisation of the health workforce.

State initiatives

'Building the Health Workforce' is one of six strategic ambitions to guide the future direction of Tasmania's health system as envisaged by Advancing Tasmania's Health, the Tasmanian Government's long term health reform plan, released in December 2022. The Tasmanian Government is also considering options to address barriers to the full utilisation of our health workforce that align with the Inquiry's recommendations. This includes (but is not limited to) existing initiatives, such as:

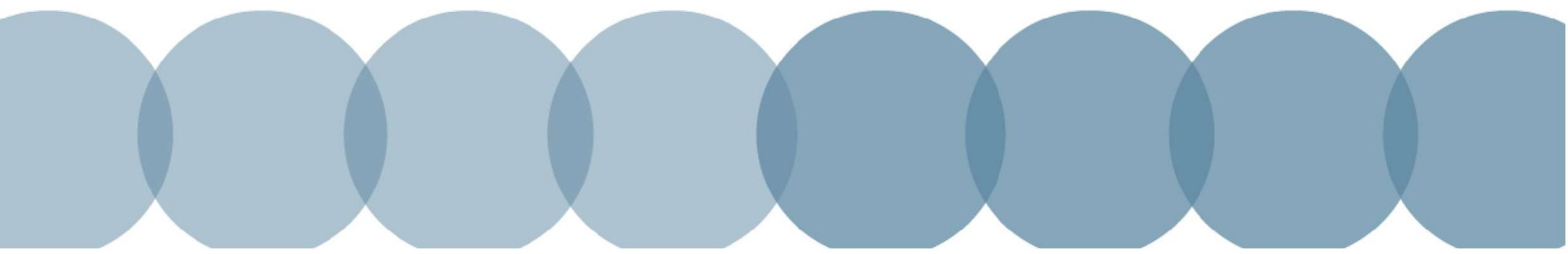
- legislative amendments to enable the term 'paramedic' to be broadly used in Tasmania. Prior to the amendment to the *Ambulance Service Act 1982*, paramedic could only be used in Ambulance Tasmania. Recognition of the term 'paramedic' outside of employment in a statutory ambulance authority is an important component in diversifying and recognising the role of paramedics in the broader health care sector,
- a pharmacy scope of practice review to consider what other services and supports this highly skilled group of professions may be able to safely provide Tasmanians. As an interim step to the completion of this review, the Department of Health is also looking at more immediate ways to extend the role of pharmacists,



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- the introduction of new Community Paramedics. Community Paramedics will be valuable resources to care for patients who present with minor illness or injury, to be treated more quickly at their call-out location and free up ambulances to deal with urgent calls more quickly. Tasmania is leading the way, as the first in Australia to pilot this new model following the success seen in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, mainly in rural, remote, regional and urban areas, and
 - strengthening of the existing Rural Medical Generalist model for the delivery of high-quality care for Tasmanians outside of the major cities, through the development of the \$4.3 million rural medical workforce centre at the Mersey Community Hospital.

As outlined in Advancing Tasmania's Health, the Tasmanian Government is also committed to exploring opportunities to extend the scope of practice of other clinical professions, such as nurse and paramedic practitioners, to better support the delivery of healthcare in our communities, particularly in rural and remote locations.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 7

Where appropriate, the Tasmanian Health Service adopt a single employer model that encompasses hospital, rural generalist and general practice services.

Discussion:

The Tasmanian Government strongly supports the adoption of a single employer model for rural generalist trainees across Tasmania. The Tasmanian Government recently announced a pilot single employer model for rural generalists trainees across the State, which is anticipated to commence mid-2023.

Under the pilot, GP Registrars will be employed by the State for the duration of their training period allowing for a seamless transition between hospital and community-based GP training placements. In effect, this will make it easier and more financially beneficial for training placements to occur in rural and regional areas – providing a sustainable pathway to strengthen the workforce in these areas for the long term.

It will also complement the current work the Tasmanian Government is doing to improve primary care access in Tasmania, including our Community Rapid Response Service, GP After Hours Support Initiative, a new Rural Medical Workforce Centre, Community Paramedics and mental health hospital in the home services.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 8

Advocate and seek support of the Australian Government to ensure the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) supports the financial viability of rural and regional general practice services including the timely implementation of the relevant recommendations from the Australian Government's MBS Review Taskforce, with particular regard to:

- a. increased rebates under the MBS related
to primary care in rural and regional settings;
- b. access to MBS rebates that enable an expansion of and appropriate remuneration for health services delivered by non-GP health professionals, including nurse practitioners, paramedic practitioners and pharmacists; and
- c. collaborative models of care.

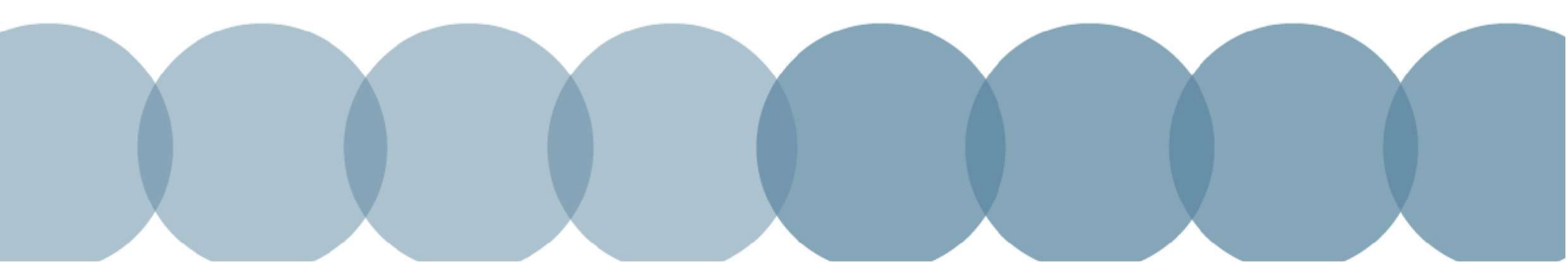
Discussion:


The Tasmanian Government welcomes close collaboration with the Commonwealth as it implements its primary care reforms, including any recommendations made by the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce, to help deliver an integrated health system that delivers better care for patients.

The primary care sector is facing challenges not just in Tasmania but right across the country. These issues are caused in part by the split in funding and policy responsibilities between states and the Commonwealth. The Tasmanian Government has publicly affirmed its willingness to work with the Commonwealth to take a collaborative approach to primary care to overcome the siloed, fragmented approach to how primary care is funded and delivered.

The Tasmanian Government has, and will continue to, advocate for the Commonwealth to consider funding and policy reforms to ensure all Australians have equitable access to GP and related primary care services. In advocating for reform, the Tasmanian Government has also highlighted the need to consider how GPs can be better supported to deliver care at low or no cost to vulnerable and disadvantaged people and communities.

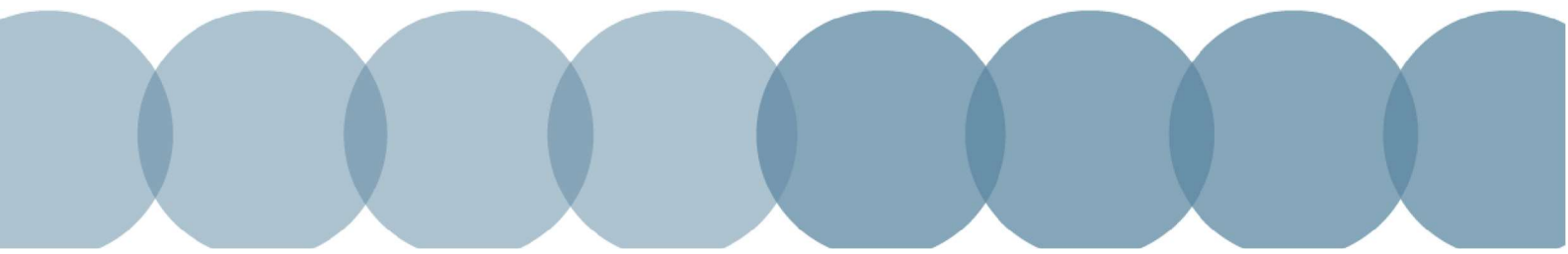
The Tasmanian Government has highlighted that cost is a known barrier impacting access to GP services in Tasmania in recent submissions to the *Senate Inquiry into provision of GP and related primary health services to rural/regional Australia* and on the *10 Year Primary Health Care Plan* consultation draft. In making these submissions, the Tasmanian Government raised the significant impacts of insufficient MBS rebates on the vulnerable population who may not be able to access (or may put off accessing) GP care, and on the viability of general practice as (mostly) privately owned businesses.





While the Commonwealth is responsible for funding GPs and primary care, the Tasmanian Government has been steadfast in its commitment to finding solutions for residents seeking to access a GP where there has been a gap to fill. For example, in September 2022 the Tasmanian Government announced that following significant work, the Tasmanian Health Service reached an agreement with a local doctor to provide residents in the Southern and Central Highland regions with GP services closer to home following the closure of the Ouse general practice in mid-April 2022.

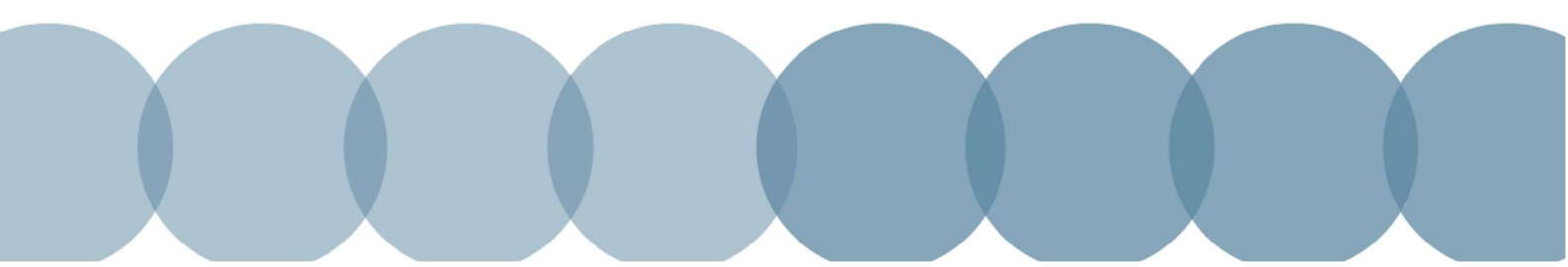
Government position: Support





Recommendation 9

To address specific workforce shortages in rural and regional Tasmania,
including:

- a. update its Health Workforce 2040 strategy with a focus on workforce shortages in rural and regional Tasmania;
 - b. develop flexible working arrangements to enhance worker retention, including guaranteed peer support, access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and adequate time away from active duty;
 - c. consider alternate funding models and remuneration of health professionals in areas of high workforce shortage;
 - d. address career pathway limitations; and
 - e. work collaboratively with UTAS, TasTAFE and other registered training authorities to identify and address key areas of workforce shortage including, but not limited to:
 - i. exercise physiologists
 - ii. general practitioners;
 - iii. neurologists;
 - iv. nurses and nurse practitioners;
 - v. occupational therapists;
 - vi. pain specialists;
 - vii. palliative care professionals;
 - viii. paramedics and paramedic practitioners;
 - ix. pharmacists;
 - x. psychologists;
 - xi. rheumatologists;
 - xii. rural generalists; and
- 



Discussion:

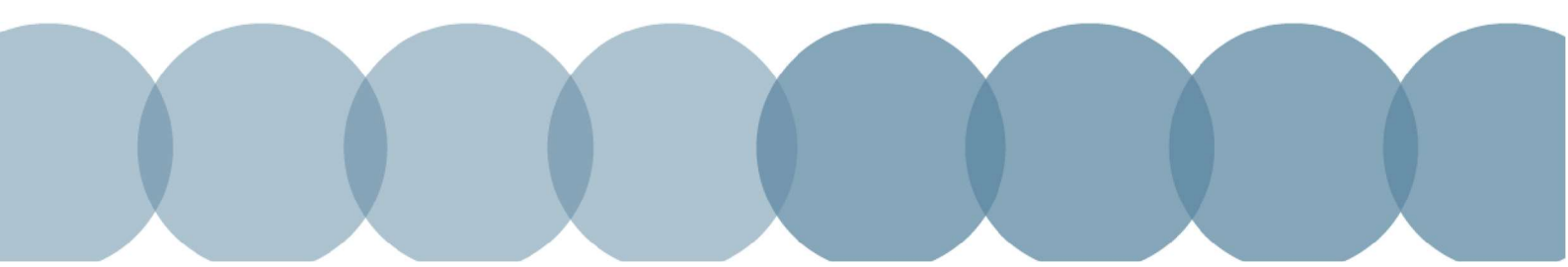
The Tasmanian Government recognises the vital role our workforce plays, every day, in caring for the Tasmanian community. The Government already has a number of strategies underway to address health workforce shortages in rural and regional Tasmania.


‘Building the Health Workforce’ is one of six strategic ambitions to guide the future direction of Tasmania’s health system as envisaged by Advancing Tasmania’s Health. As part of this plan, the Tasmania Government has committed to working towards building a health workforce that can access professional development opportunities and specialist capability for health professionals working in rural and remote areas of Tasmania.

This plan is supported by the Tasmanian Government’s *Health Workforce 2040*, Tasmania’s long-term strategy to shape a health workforce that meets the needs of Tasmanians now and into the future. *Health Workforce 2040* has been developed following extensive consultation with health professionals, their representative bodies, education providers and consumers. To tackle the long-term challenges of building a sustainable health workforce for all Tasmanians, *Health Workforce 2040* focuses on six areas:

- shaping the health workforce to make sure Tasmania has the right numbers and types of health professionals
- education and training
- fostering innovation
- enhancing culture and wellbeing
- recruitment and effective working arrangements, and
- planning.

Health Workforce 2040 clearly outlines the issues with attracting and retaining a skilled health workforce in rural and regional areas of Tasmania and has identified a range of actions that are strategically aimed at priorities such as:

- building training pipelines in the north and north west of Tasmania. This includes working with the University of Tasmania, TasTAFE and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to build local professional entry courses;
 - developing speciality training networks that will provide increased training in the regional areas; and
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- providing leadership development and management development opportunities for emerging leaders and mid-level managers.

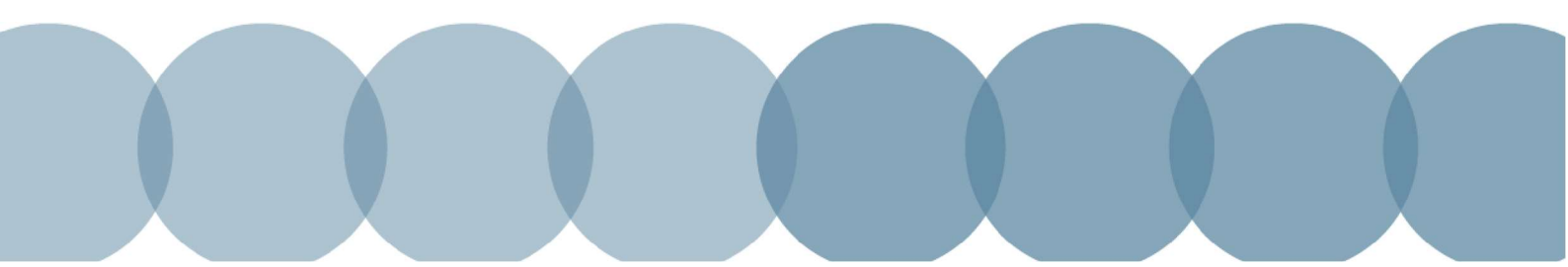
Successfully implementing *Health Workforce 2040* will require the Tasmanian Government, the private sector and educational institutions to work in partnership to develop shared recruitment and employment strategies. For example, the Department of Health is already working closely with the University of Tasmania to develop arrangements for conjoint appointments between the two organisations. In addition, the Clifford Craig Research Foundation is working with the Department of Health on ways that research programs can be used to attract and retain staff.


Health Workforce 2040 is not a static document. The first annual review will be released in early 2023 and there will be ongoing consultation and review to consider future priority actions under the Health Workforce 2040 strategy. This will include ongoing consideration of actions which respond to the rural and regional health workforce issues and areas of identified workforce need.

In parallel, the Commonwealth, working with the states, has developed the *National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021–31* and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031*. The Tasmanian Government will continue to work in partnership with the Commonwealth to ensure national workforce strategies assist in developing the Tasmanian health workforce.

The Tasmanian Government continues to work with and listen to our health workforce to deliver immediate changes that address workload pressures. In recognition of the vital and ongoing role our frontline health workers have in the State's COVID-19 response, the Tasmanian Government introduced a Frontline Health COVID-19 Allowance payment. This payment is a one off payment of \$2,000 paid pro rata to relevant Tasmanian Health Service and Ambulance Tasmania staff. The eligible cohort for the payment is approximately 11,500 workers across the State including eligible health workforce in rural and remote areas.

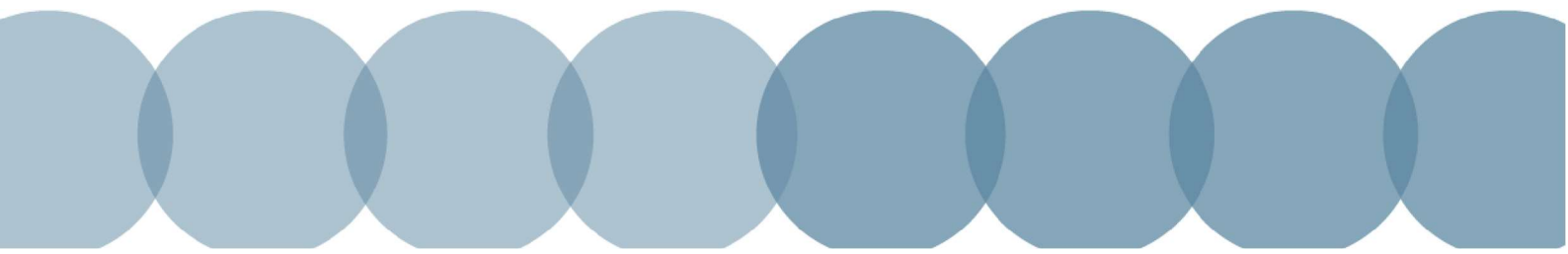
The Tasmanian Government also recognises the importance of providing access to flexible working arrangements where possible and appropriate (noting service objectives and health and safety considerations). The Department of Health already offers a variety of flexible work options and is exploring further opportunities to increase these to support attraction and retention, and the health and wellbeing of our health workforce.





As noted in the response to Recommendation 6, the workforce shortages and recruitment challenges highlighted by the Inquiry, and the particular impact this has on health services within rural and regional areas, are national issues that Tasmania is not facing alone. Tasmania is participating in national, collaborative work to address national health workforce shortages looking at ways we can collectively improve the quantity, distribution (across specialisations and geographical locations, including regional, rural, remote and high need areas) and training and support for our healthcare workers. This includes addressing barriers preventing the full utilisation of the health workforce.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 10

Actively consider funding the Higher Education Contributions Scheme (HECS) costs of nursing, midwifery and allied health undergraduate students and provide scholarships for postgraduate studies, including nurse practitioner specialities and allied health professionals, in areas of identified workforce shortage.

Discussion:

The Tasmanian Government is exploring innovative ways to attract, recruit and retain Tasmania's health workforce, including nursing, midwifery and allied healthcare workers and undergraduates.

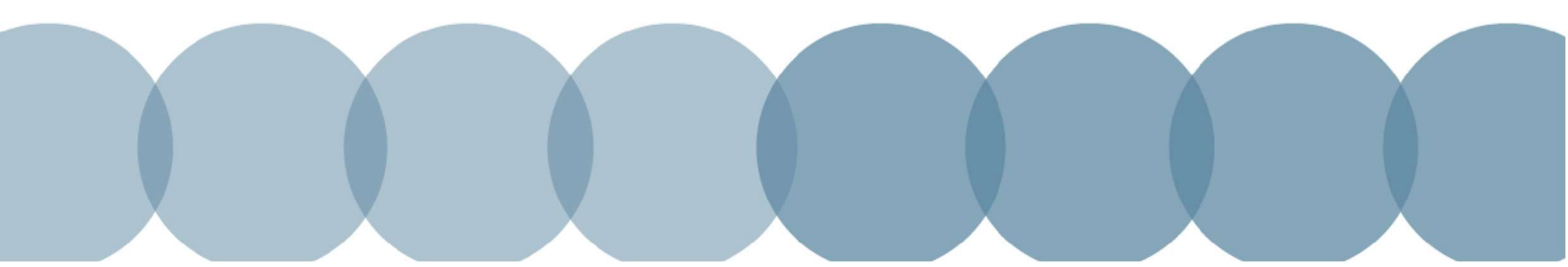
The Tasmanian Government recently announced a scholarship program for Allied Health professionals which will target students in a range of allied health professions who are completing their final year of study in 2023 to either stay in the State after graduating or relocate and work in Tasmania. The Scholarship will see up to 45 allied health graduates begin their careers with the Tasmanian Health Service from 2024 providing an immediate workforce boost on the ground in areas that are currently experiencing workforce shortages


There is also currently in place a Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt reduction scheme – introduced by the Commonwealth – for rural doctors and nurse practitioners to encourage eligible health workers to live and work in rural, remote or very remote areas of Australia.

The Tasmanian Government is working collaboratively with the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) to create opportunities for graduates and to support our nurses and midwives in their professional and academic endeavours.

The Tasmanian Government's Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship Program, implemented in early 2022, saw 91 scholarships awarded statewide, many in areas and regions of critical workforce need. Building on the success of its existing scholarship programs, the Tasmanian Government is currently developing a Rural and Remote Nursing Scholarship Program that will target the upskilling of rural and remote nurses in the future.

In August 2022, the Tasmanian Government put a proposal to the ANMF to address retention and recruitment and outlined the Government's plan to reduce workload pressures in public hospitals, which will in turn alleviate pressure on hospital staff including nurses and midwives. The proposals have been accepted by the ANMF.





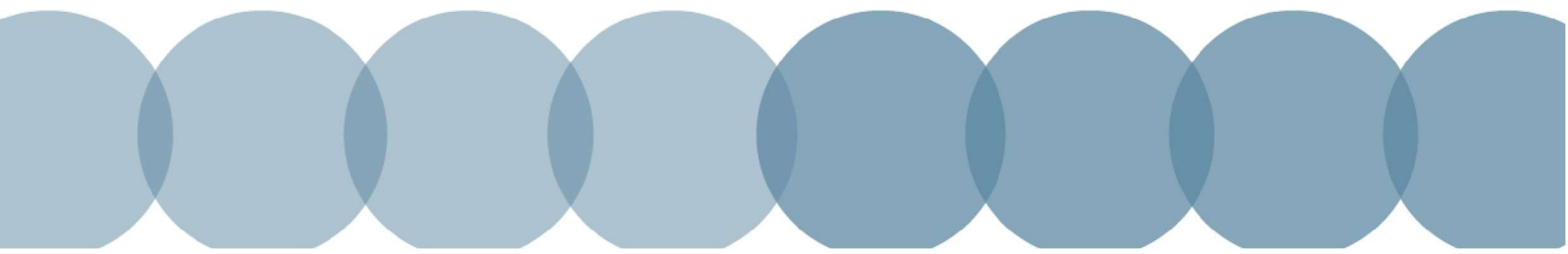
A Strategic Nursing Recruitment and Retention Working Group has been established and first met in November 2022, bringing together key health officials and union representatives to deliver new workforce modelling to manage pandemic peaks and a range of other recruitment initiatives. This includes a trial of Clinical Nurse Coaches on public hospital wards as requested by ANMF, who will mentor and support early career nurses, as well as reforms to the *Statewide Nursing Transition to Practice Model*, providing a standing job offer for all UTAS nursing graduates which would provide them with a pathway to permanency, accelerated probationary periods, and would remove the requirement for individual interviews, significantly saving time for senior nursing staff and fast-tracking recruitment processes.

The Department of Health is working closely with the University of Tasmania to support their plans to introduce a suite of allied health programs, including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech pathology. This will have a positive impact on the supply of these professions in Tasmania and provide professional development and diversity in career options for Tasmania's allied health professionals.

As part of *Health Workforce 2040*, the Tasmanian Government is providing \$400 000 for the continued development of the Allied Health Rural Generalist (AHRG) Pathway in north and north-west of Tasmania. This work builds on the pilot program led by the Department of Health Chief Allied Health Advisor in 2018-2020. It will focus on contextualising the AHRG Pathway to Tasmania through our partnership with the University of Tasmania and creating pathways to support retention in rural and regional Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government also committed \$6 million in the 2022-23 State Budget for the Allied Health Education and Training Program (\$1.5m per annum in recurrent funding). This funding has expanded the number of clinical lead – education and training resources across the Department of Health and the Department for Education, Children and Young People.

Government position: Supported in part





Recommendation 11

Work with the Federal Government to improve access to digital health care in rural and regional Tasmania through:

- a. ensuring rural communities have access to modern digital infrastructure and associated technology in rural health facilities; and
- b. a targeted, community centred approach to investment in digital literacy.

Discussion:

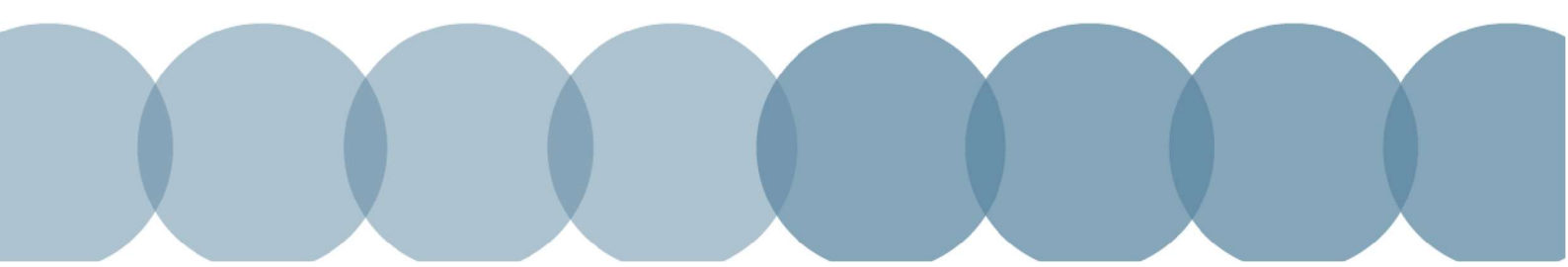
The Tasmanian Government is already progressing digital health initiatives that will support improved access to equitable health care in rural and regional areas.


Through the 2022-23 State Budget, the Tasmanian Government has committed \$150 million over the next four years to upgrade Tasmania's digital health infrastructure. This commitment forms part of the Tasmanian Government Department of Health's 10-year digital health strategy '*Digital Health Transformation – Improving Patient Outcomes 2022 – 2032*' (the Strategy). It is anticipated that over the life of the 10-year strategy an investment of around \$476 million will be allocated to this project.

The Strategy will provide new ways of caring for the health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians, enabled by digital health technologies. The development of the strategy was informed by consultation with clinicians, patients and carers, in addition to applying locally relevant digital health insights from other jurisdictions across Australia, to deliver better health outcomes to Tasmanians.

The Australian Digital Health Agency (the Agency), with funding and support from the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments is delivering the current National Digital Health Strategy (the National Strategy) and developing the new five-year National Strategy. There are strong national digital health technologies and foundations in place, with real traction achieved over the last four to five years. The Tasmanian Strategy leverages and builds on those foundations and is closely aligned to the National Strategy.

Within the Strategy there are three 'horizons' which outline a roadmap to deliver effective digital transformation over the next 10 years. The Strategy aims to deliver economic and social benefits to the community, such as improved patient experience (for example, reduction in travel and increased access to healthcare professionals via virtual care technologies) to help achieve better health outcomes for Tasmanians. Each horizon is expected to deliver incremental benefits in rural, remote and regional areas.





There are a range of opportunities within the Strategy to co-design and partner with the Commonwealth, such as:

- enhanced integration with My Health Record and other patient services,
- Secure Messaging Services to provide greater protection of patient data when exchanging information between care settings,
- ongoing investments in the National Health Services Directory to make it easier to find specialist and generalist care,
- greater adoption of electronic prescriptions, and
- the digitisation of pregnancy and child digital health records.

The Tasmanian Government is also undertaking telehealth and virtual care initiatives which will extend access to care into the home and community-based settings. For example, the Department of Health's Virtual Care Expansion project underway will create an accessible state-wide virtual care service helping patients in rural and regional areas overcome the barriers of geographical distance to access equitable healthcare.

The Tasmanian Government's *Healthy Tasmania Five-Year Strategic Plan 2022-2026* identifies digital technology as one of the determinants of equity and access to health services for Tasmanians. Improving digital literacy is one of the focus areas of the Department of Health's *Tasmania's Health Literacy Action Plan 2019-2024*. Improving digital literacy – as a component of increasing health literacy overall – will help put Tasmanians in charge of their health care.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 12

Ensure all communications related to the availability of health services in rural and regional areas of Tasmania, are clear, contemporary and accessible.

Discussion:

This recommendation aligns with the Tasmanian Government's Communications Policy and the approach taken by the Department of Health in developing and publishing communication material. It is also aligned with the Tasmanian Government's ongoing commitment to improving health literacy – as set out in the Department of Health's *Tasmania's Health Literacy Action Plan 2019-2024*.

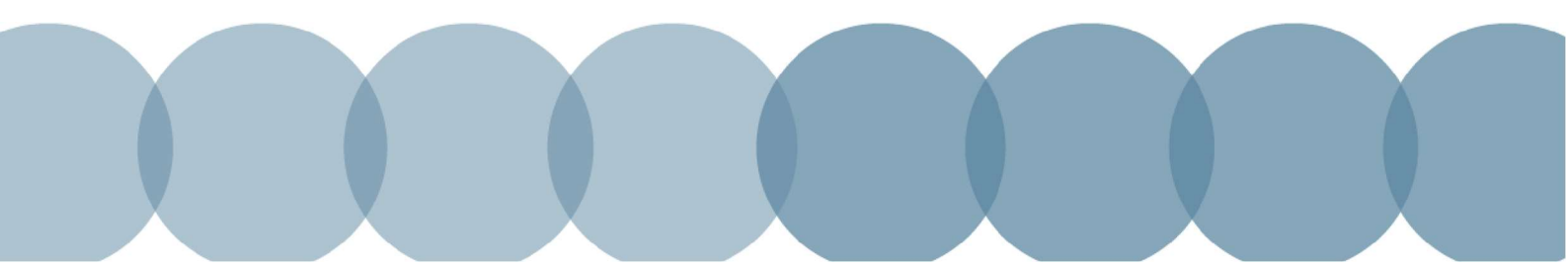
Department of Health communications


The Tasmanian community includes people with diverse communication needs. The Department of Health ensures communication materials are accessible to all. This includes making sure to meet the needs of people: with low levels of literacy, with sensory or cognitive disabilities, who rely on assistive technology, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and with limited access to technology. Particular attention is given to ensuring the public can understand and use the information in the way it is intended. For example, to maximise accessibility of information the Department of Health:

- considers the accessibility of particular communication methods among target audiences when designing communications strategies,
- uses plain language, a consistent style and an appropriate tone to ensure target audiences can understand information being communicated,
- considers the need to deliver information in alternative formats depending on the target audiences, and
- ensures information published on websites is accessible to all Tasmanians in accordance with international accessibility requirements.

Tasmania's Health Literacy Action Plan

The Tasmanian Government recognises that low health literacy contributes to poor health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. To address this, the Department of Health, has implemented a range of health literacy measures as part of its Health Literacy Action Plan. The Action Plan provides a clear focus for creating a health literate Tasmania. It sets achievable goals for healthcare and community providers across the state to help

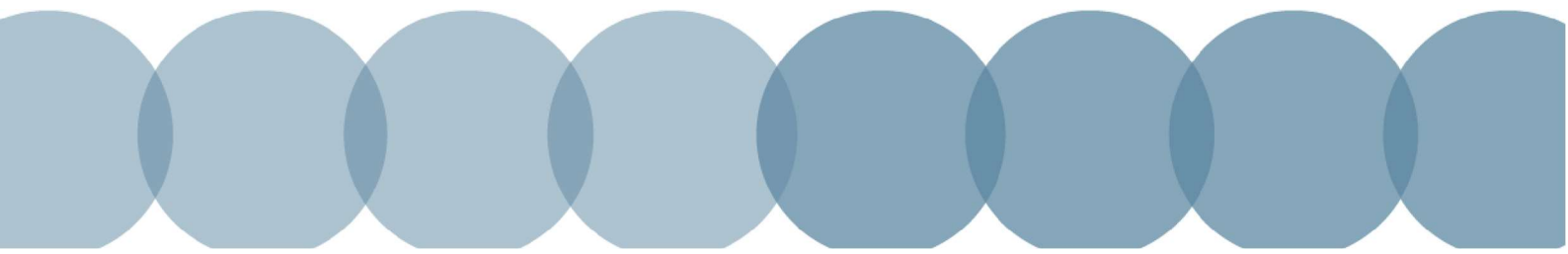




improve health literacy for individuals, communities and organisations, including those in rural and regional Tasmania across four specific priorities:

- improve community health literacy awareness,
- increase health literate organisations,
- develop a health literate workforce, and
- create partnerships to improve health outcomes.

Government position: Support





Recommendation 13

Consider the employment of Health Systems Navigators, particularly in rural and regional Tasmania, to assist individuals and families to find and engage with appropriate health professionals and services.

Discussion:

The Department of Health will consider the employment of Health System Navigators in line with the Inquiry's recommendation. The Tasmanian Government recognises that continuity of care and equitable, timely access to services is important to patients. The Tasmanian Government is committed to ensuring that the health system is patient centred and that people and their families – particularly those living in rural and regional areas – can find and engage with health services and providers.

There is alignment between the objectives of the recommended Health System Navigator positions with existing Complex Care Coordinator positions within the Department of Health. Complex Care Coordinators work out of the major public hospitals in the south and north of the State. The role of Complex Care Coordinators includes developing and promoting effective partnerships between the public health services and external community service providers to coordinate and provide high-quality care for patients with complex care requirements. Complex Care Coordinators are highly qualified allied health professionals who advocate for patients at risk of long stay to enable seamless navigation through the health network, and support the involvement and education of patients, families/carers and other key stakeholders to ensure optimal patient flow.

Government position: Support

