



## CENTRAL HIGHLANDS PHARMACY

### **Submission to the Inquiry into Rural Health Services – PHARMACY SERVICES**

**March 2021**

The Central Highlands region of Tasmania is the second largest Local Government Area of Tasmania, after the West Coast, and the least densely populated, with only 0.3 people per square kilometre.

The 2016 Census data, lists that the average equivalised total household income is \$546 per week versus \$877 for Australia as a whole. Additional to this, the Central Highlands has an unemployment rate of 8 percent, compared to 6.9 percent nationally. This income disparity underlies the prohibition to health seeking behaviours, that low income and high travel costs to the nearest pharmacy service may provide.

The only specialised pharmacy service provided in the Central Highlands Municipality is that of Central Highlands Pharmacy, which is located in Bothwell. This pharmacy employs qualified pharmacists, and provides the following services:-

1. Prescription Dispensing
2. Medication education and counselling
3. MedsChecks
4. Diabetes MedsChecks
5. Staged Supply
6. Diabetes Education
7. Vaccination services
8. Dose Administration Aids packaging
9. Medication Profiling
10. Medication Adherence Surveillance
11. Return of Unwanted Medicines Service
12. Smoking Ceassation Advice
13. Minor Health Ailments advice and recommendation
14. Blood Pressure Monitoring service
15. Triaging with allied health professionals and community services
16. Social and mental health empathy and referral service
17. Clinical Interventions
18. Compounding Service

The General Practice at Ouse has a dispensing doctor, who diagnoses patients and then supplies their medicines from the inventory that they have available.

Although Ouse (which services: Ouse, Hamilton, Ellendale, Taraleah, Waytinnah, and Bronte Park) has a General Practitioner who dispenses medication, this is not the Gold Standard pharmacy service as having a specialist trained pharmacist servicing this area, and thus introduction of specialist pharmacist services shall enhance patient medication education whilst improving quality use of medicines and health literacy.

To move toward this Gold Standard of Pharmacy Services for the greater Ouse area, options could include greenfield development of a branch of the Central Highlands Pharmacy, or provision of pharmacy depot/s within Ouse and the surrounding townships ie Taraleah, Ellendale, etc. This shall require further investment of funds to setup

The accessibility of the Central Highlands Pharmacy for the Bothwell/Lakes District is most accessible for those who live in or around the township of Bothwell, but much more difficult for those in the “Great Lakes” of the Central Highlands – especially localities of Miena, Fitzgerald, Shannon, Arthurs Lakes, Interlaken, etc which are upto 60 kilometers away from Bothwell.

In order to meet this challenge, Central Highlands Pharmacy management has instigated in collaboration with Community Services ie Corumbene to outreach these areas, and by providing a delivery service to Miena, Bothwell, Melton Mowbray, Kempton, Dysart, and Hamilton, but more improvement in this outreach is required, which may involve developing pharmacy depots in some large locations eg Miena, Hamilton, and Kempton.

The average distance to “other” pharmacy services (metropolitan Hobart) for Central Highlands residents shall cost the consumer on a 2.5 hour return trip (170 kilometers return), upto \$20 per trip.. This is a significant impost on this lower-socioeconomic community, thus the importance of their local specialised pharmacy service at Central Highlands Pharmacy.

The Central Highlands Pharmacy plays a major role in chronic and acute disease management, particularly given that there is a rationing of general practitioner appointments. Given this lack of supply of medical appointments, whilst high demand for the services by the Central Highlands Community, the individual affect upon the patients will depend upon whether their medical condition is acute or chronic: -

If acute and serious, the patients shall need to call 000 and be transported to the RHH for medical attention.

If acute and not so serious, then they have the option of seeing the local pharmacist for advice and treatment, but if not in the scope of the pharmacist, then referral to a general practitioner is necessary.

Although there are full-time doctors in Oatlands and Ouse, the medical practice in Bothwell is part-time (only 2 days a week), with in-consistent hours of operation. Most local, surrounding, and suburban GP practices have either a two-week waiting period or have closed their books, which often results in patients withdrawing from seeking help or the patients are referred to the RHH casualty.

Longer-term, this lack of availability of doctor services, shall result in lowered patient health outcomes. whilst adding to the pressure on the Ambulance services and the Royal Hobart Hospital Casualty Department.

If the patient has chronic health conditions, then the patients can be seen at the Bothwell Medical Practice, Oatlands Medical Practice or Ouse Medical Practice if they book their appointments in advance. But experience by the author, is that the demand for medical appointments in the Central Highlands is NOT satisfied by the current supply of doctor appointments available, especially in Bothwell and Oatlands.

Evidence of the poor health outcomes within the Central Highlands has been highlighted by the Royal Flying Doctors Research Report, Looking Ahead (2018)<sup>1</sup>. This Report provides evidence of the low level of medical visits (per head of population) versus the rest of Australia (Table 4.1, page 44 of this report). This table illustrates that the Central Highlands region's population tops Australia as having the lowest medical service supply in 2016-17 with 2103.2 services per 1000 people, compared to Australia's Rural & Remote average of 2994.7.

This illustrates the enormous inequity of the Central Highlands disadvantaged rural/remote population, whilst highlighting that either, there is NOT enough Medical Practitioners in the area, or the population does NOT have easy access to the service, or individuals suffer low health literacy thus do not seek medical attention when needed. Probably a combination of all these three factors?

Thus in conclusion, the medical visits in the Central Highlands Municipality is the lowest of any municipality in Australia – caused by low health seeking behaviours, and thus, causing lower resident health outcomes. Local factors which are adding to lowered health seeking behaviours are: lower average income, lower education levels (therefore lower health literacy); isolation, remoteness or distance to the nearest alternative service (Hobart City).

The Central Highlands Pharmacy is helping to bridge that gap, by providing a primary health destination for minor health ailments and acts as a triage centre, particularly when no doctor service is available. Adding to this, the pharmacy offers Medication CHECKS, Webster Packing, Medication education, Medication profiling, Clinical Interventions, Staged Supply, Vaccination Services, Diabetes Education, and many other services. But outreach to all surrounding areas from the Lakes Districts to Melton Mowbray, Kempton, Hamilton, Ouse, Ellendale, Tarraleah, Bronte Park, etc. needs to be improved via enhanced depots, enhanced delivery service, and maybe greenfield development of a pharmacy at Ouse to improve the coverage of pharmacy services.

Although, the local pharmacy shall pick up health need demand, within a pharmacist's scope of practice, referral to GP or the RHH will need to occur, if the medical problem is outside the pharmacist's scope. If the supply of doctor hours is low in the area, then referral to casualty at the RHH shall need to occur. Full time general practice services are required in Bothwell, to relieve the overburdened demand on Oatlands Medical Practice, which currently services many of the Central Highlands community who attend Oatlands because there are not sufficient appointments available at Bothwell, or the public prefer to go to a medical practice that operates 5 days a week.

One way of improving the current unequal spread and supply of general practice and pharmacy services, maybe if all parties were to focus upon their speciality, whilst working much more collaboratively, to support each other's vital service (plus viability) and to improve patient outcomes. This may involve working as some official/unofficial co-operative or association in which rostering, patient covering, and extended outreach development occur.

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<sup>i</sup> Brigit Obrist, \* Nelly Iteba, Christian Lengeler, Ahmed Makemba, Christopher Mshana, Rose Nathan, Sandra Alba, Angel Dillip, Manuel W Hetzel, Iddy Mayumana, Alexander Schulze, and Hassan Mshinda, (2007) Access to Health Care in Contexts of Livelihood Insecurity: A Framework for Analysis and Action, as cited on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at: [PLoS Med.](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040308) 2007 Oct; 4(10): e308. Published online 20 07 Oct 23. doi: [10.1371/journal.pmed.0040308](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040308) PMID: [17958467](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17958467/) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2039761/>

<sup>i</sup> Bothwell Medical Centre (2019) Opening Hours, as cited at on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2019: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Bothwell-Medical-Centre-646236458918193/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Bothwell-Medical-Centre-646236458918193/about/?ref=page_internal)

<sup>i</sup> Royal Flying Doctor Service (August 2018). Looking Ahead, Responding to the health needs of country Australia in 2028 – the centenary of the RFDS, table 4.1, p44; p46-49., as cited at: [https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/assets/documents/RN064\\_Looking\\_Ahead\\_Report\\_D3.pdf](https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/assets/documents/RN064_Looking_Ahead_Report_D3.pdf) on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019

<sup>i</sup> ABS Census (2016): Central Highlands (M) (TAS.) (LGA) (61010), as cited online on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2019, at site:-

[https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary&region=61010&dataset=ABS\\_REGIONAL\\_LGA2017&maplayerid=LGA2017&geoconcept=LGA\\_2017&datasetAS](https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary&region=61010&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA2017&maplayerid=LGA2017&geoconcept=LGA_2017&datasetAS)