



Central Highlands Council

Submission to the Rural Health Services Inquiry by Legislative Council

As the second largest Tasmanian council by area, but one of the smallest by population we are challenged constantly by limited health services.

We have addressed the following Terms of Reference.

- **Primary Care, allied health and General practice services**
- **Pharmacy**
- **Community Health Centres**
- **Ambulance**
- **Transport**

THE POSITIVES....

The Central Highlands has two GP practices

“Central Highlands General Practice” in Ouse is open varied hours Monday to Friday. Dr Renier Swart is the principal GP and is supported by Dr Michael Ridgers and Dr Robert Newton. The State government provides some assistance to support this practice as well as ongoing assistance from the Central Highlands Council.

“Bothwell Doctors” practice is operated Monday to Wednesday. Dr Mary Lumsden operates this practice with the support of other GP’s who are based out of her practice at “Brighton Regional Doctors”. Until late 2019, the Central Highlands Council was having great difficulty sourcing a GP to take over the practice. With some financial assistance from the State Government and ongoing financial support from the council, we are very grateful to Dr Lumsden and her team for taking on the running of this busy practice and providing much needed medical service to the Bothwell area.

Without support from the State Government and ongoing support from the Central Highlands Council, GP services in the area would most likely cease to exist. We would like to continue to guarantee our residents security in this area, even though it is not usually the responsibility of Local Government. We look forward to working with State Government representatives to ensure the continuity of medical services.

On the days when the practices are not open, the pressure on other health services is increased, including the Midlands Multipurpose Health Centre at Oatlands as well as centres at New Norfolk, Brighton and of course the RHH.

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Other health programs and allied health services available in the Central Highlands

Central Highlands Community Health Centre based at Ouse and operated by THS. Services available by appointment include registered nurse consultations, pathology, community transport, podiatrist, child health nurse, and a community vegetable garden. Other limited services are provided at the centre.

This centre replaced the Ouse District Hospital when it was downgraded to a health centre in 2006. It is vital that this service is not downgraded any further. The services outlined above are essential to the health and wellbeing of all residents in the Central Highlands.

Health Promotion Coordinator (THS) is based at Ash Cottage Ouse and is also part of the THS. Many preventative health programs are coordinated through this service including exercise classes, community walking groups, health education, health literacy, healthy eating programs, play groups, meal delivery programs, social support and wellbeing programs that aim to reduce loneliness and isolation in our community.

Both abovementioned services reach out to all areas in the Central Highlands and work towards creating healthier residents and communities. Unfortunately, with limited funding and ongoing reliance on grants, the impact of these programs is restricted.

The Central Highlands Municipality also has a very proactive group known as **HATCH** (Health Action Team Central Highlands) which applies for grants to fund health promotion and preventative health programs (e.g. Highlands Healthy Connect project through Healthy Tasmania Community Grants).

These services are also supported by excellent outreach services and Non-Government Organisations such as Corumbene Care (based at New Norfolk), Rural Alive and Well (RAW), Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) Youth Mental Health Program, and other providers from time to time.

Pharmacy services are provided Monday to Friday at the Bothwell Pharmacy operated by Terry Burnett. A dispensary service is provided for patients at the Central Highlands General Practice in Ouse.

Volunteer Ambulance services are based at Bothwell, Miena and Ellendale. These volunteer services have provided invaluable emergency first aid assistance in these rural & remote areas. There is currently a paramedic stationed at Miena which was implemented during Covid-19 and it is hoped that this service will continue. The biggest challenge is the ongoing difficulties recruiting new volunteers. Additional government support in this area would be greatly appreciated and make a huge difference to these small communities.

A **Central Highlands Health & Wellbeing Plan** was recently developed and endorsed by council in partnership HATCH, THS Health Promotion Coordinator and consultant Fae Robinson to assist our community to work towards better health outcomes.

Research and submissions published by **Primary Health Tasmania, RAW** and **RFDS** support statistics that rural and remote communities have serious health issues including obesity, drug and alcohol addiction, diabetes and serious mental health conditions to name a few.

WHAT COULD WORK BETTER....

Despite the services mentioned above, there are major problems and shortcomings with the availability and accessibility of health services in rural & remote areas such as the Central Highlands.

Aside from the obvious problem of funding, **the biggest challenge we identify facing adequate health service provision is lack of coordination.** We identify that services operate individually as silos instead of working cooperatively and in partnership. In some instances, services double up and some fail due to lack of support.

As little as 30 years ago, the system of 'Community Health Nursing' run by THS/DHHS was the backbone of Rural Health in Tasmania. Nursing and allied health staff working in rural areas were the conduit between health services and the community.

A department/area within **THS** solely responsible for **Rural Health Coordination** would go a long way in assisting not only Government Departments and Hospitals but also NGO's in communicating, supporting each other, and informing communities in a more efficient manner.

GP shortages in rural areas is an area we highlight in which communities are classified under the "**Modified Monash Model**". Central Highlands is classed as "Outer Regional" despite covering some of the most remote areas in Tasmania. If it was possible to negotiate/lobby with the Federal Government to reconsider some of these classifications it would possibly assist to attract GP's to rural areas in Tasmania.

Rural communities across Tasmania and Australia are renowned for their resilience and ability to come up with solutions to their own problems. By listening to these people, there will no doubt be some excellent suggestions. By implementing some of the suggestions and ideas your inquiry receives, it will go a long way to improving health outcomes in rural areas, which in turn will reduce the pressure on the health services in the larger urban areas.

The Central Highlands Council, the varied service providers and the community thank the Legislative Council for undertaking this important inquiry. We look forward to reading your findings and hopefully benefitting from improvements in the health system.

We would welcome face to face discussions with you if that was possible.



Clr Anita Campbell

On Behalf of Central Highlands Council and the HATCH Committee