

Minister for Health  
Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management  
Minister for Science and Technology  
Leader of the House



Ministerial Office: Level 5, 4 Salamanca Place, Hobart Tas  
Ph: (03) 6165 7701  
Launceston Office: Public Buildings, 53 St Johns Street, Launceston Tas  
Ph: (03) 6777 1032  
Postal Address: GPO Box 123, Hobart, TAS, 7001  
Email: [michael.ferguson@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:michael.ferguson@dpac.tas.gov.au)

Hon Rob Valentine MLC  
Chair  
Legislative Council Government Administration Sub-Committee A Inquiry into Acute Health Services in Tasmania  
Via email to Committee Secretary: [jenny.mannering@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:jenny.mannering@parliament.tas.gov.au)

Dear Chair

**RE. Further Submission to the Legislative Council Government Administration Sub-Committee A Inquiry into Acute Health Services in Tasmania**

The Government acknowledges and thanks the Sub-Committee for providing the opportunity to supplement and add to earlier submissions (provided as attachments to this submission for reference).

Following the final hearing of the Sub-Committee on 12 December 2018, and the release of the Interim Report (the Report) on 20 December 2018, the Government provided a public response to the Report's eight Key Findings and single Recommendation – *"The Sub-Committee recommends all parties fully consider the key findings contained in this Interim Report and work collaboratively to propose, refine and implement solutions to the challenges and problems identified within the Tasmanian Health Service and the State's major hospitals"*.

A formal response to the Sub-Committee's Interim Report Key Findings is attached to this submission, and has been updated from the initial public statement to better reflect the current context and to include some of the significant initiatives resulting from the 2018-19 Budget (the Budget).

The Government is committed to building a better health system and our strong plan for health is threefold:

- investing more into frontline services over the short and longer term;
- addressing the health infrastructure constraints that our system is presently confronting, following decades of underinvestment and in the face of demographic challenges; and
- planning for the future of our health system to ensure it is aligning with our community's needs.

Importantly, the Budget commences the Government's six-year \$757 million plan to boost health services in the north, south and north west as committed at the 2018 State Election.

Once fully rolled out, this plan will see a significant uplift in capacity with almost 300 new

hospital beds, a greater range of services right across the State and over 1300 FTE more frontline staff.

In addition to the policies taken to the election, the Government has also provided a further \$20 million for elective surgery, to take our total additional funding for elective surgery to \$100 million since 2014.

The Government acknowledges the challenges posed by increasing demand and acuity on our health system, which are being experienced by jurisdictions both nationally and internationally.

We are determined to make the necessary investments to ensure the Tasmanian community can continue to access world class health care.

### **Building a Better Health System**

The Government has a plan to build a better health system - by providing immediate support for our hospitals, investing in frontline staff over the long term and building the health infrastructure our system needs to expand service capacity.

Over the last four years there have been significant investments made into Tasmania's health system, including the Government's decisions that have seen every usable hospital ward in the state opened and providing care.

These investments are most evident in the Government's record on health staff recruitment. The facts are that there are now over 600 FTE more frontline health staff in our system than there were when we first came to Government in March 2014 - including over 375 FTE nurses and almost 90 FTE more doctors.<sup>1</sup>

The Government took a further range of important initiatives to meet rising health service demand to the 2018 State Election, and has commenced delivering these in the Budget.

Over the next six years Tasmanians can look forward with confidence towards key developments for our system, including:

- The recruitment of over 1300 FTE more frontline health staff;
- Almost 300 new hospital beds;
- 25 new mental health beds and inpatient child and adolescent mental health facilities for the first time ever;
- 42 new rural and regional paramedics and a dedicated aeromedical retrieval service;
- 180 more graduate nurse positions;
- New Community Rapid Response hospital in the home services for the north west and the south;
- New funding for preventative health measures;
- Better palliative care in the north west and more support through Palliative Care Tasmania;
- Capital redevelopments, upgrades and air conditioning works at the Mersey, Launceston General Hospital (LGH) and North West Regional Hospital (NWRH);
- Updated master plans for both the LGH and Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) campuses; and

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<sup>1</sup> March 2014 – March 2018

- The completion and commissioning of K-Block at RHH.

These commitments, and the many others from the Budget that are not listed, are fully funded and will be delivered.

### **Planning for the Future**

The Government is committed to ensuring our health system is developing in alignment with a long term, strategic vision. In particular, it is incumbent upon the Government to ensure that our health services and hospital infrastructure are capable of meeting the future needs of the Tasmanian community.

To meet these strategic needs, the Government has commenced a number of initiatives with urgency so that we can hope to never again face the prospect of being required to play catch up.

The Government has delivered \$500,000 to update the master plans for both the RHH and LGH, commenced the Clinical Planning and Mental Health Integration Taskforces, fast-tracked the Workforce Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Planning Unit, and is undertaking feasibility studies into Urgent Care Centres to service outer-urban populations.

With respect to the RHH master plan, the Government has committed to engage constructively with stakeholders and is considering a range of proposals that have been put forward. This work will be completed by February 2019.

Our staff and key health stakeholders will be crucial partners in these processes, as they are experts in how our system can best function. They know what environments will allow them to best care for Tasmanians, so it is vital that they are listened to and valued as part of this work.

The Government is also continuing to appropriately progress the \$100 million Calvary private hospital co-location proposal through the unsolicited bids process. This process is being handled by the Office of the Coordinator-General and has progressed to the second stage, with the Assessment Panel and Calvary working together to finalise the appropriate location within the health precinct to ensure it meets the needs of both parties and future plans.

### **System Challenges**

It is no secret that the Tasmanian health system is experiencing a high rate of growth in emergency activity and patient acuity. Indicative of this situation is that over the last financial year there was 15 per cent growth in Emergency Department presentations which converted to admissions, and six per cent growth in emergency surgery. These figures are inclusive of the significant impact resulting from the extraordinary winter flu season during 2017.

The Government is determined to back our frontline health professionals and to support them to provide the best possible care, which is why in addition to longer term initiatives the Government is also in the process of providing more immediate support for the LGH and RHH emergency departments.

It is important to note that the Government is only able make these investments because of the Budget strong fiscal position and our firm commitment to doing all that we are able to do to ease pressure on our health services.

The recent \$1.5 million package for the RHH and LGH developed by the Secretary of the Department of Health is specifically designed to improve patient flow and bed management, and to put downward pressure on closely related challenges such as ramping and bed block.

In addition to this package and in response to specific acute demand challenges at the LGH, the Government has also delivered five more permanently funded beds on Ward 4D, implemented a new transit lounge to better manage patient flow, and is in the process of recruiting new nursing assistants.

These new investments are all recognition by the Government that our acute health services are currently experiencing demand pressures and that we are determined to act.

With respect to recent safety events at the LGH, it is important to be clear that any violence or aggression directed towards staff or patients is completely unacceptable. The Department has taken prompt action to review the incidents and will be looking into any further measures that may be needed to ensure staff safety.

In addition to more visible demand-driven pressures in emergency departments, there are other health and hospital matters that have recently received public attention.

The Government takes accreditation processes seriously and is dedicated to ensuring our staff have the resources and support they need to maintain the State's outstanding accreditation record. Accreditation should be unremarkable and routine, to ensure our staff and services are given every opportunity without the implied pressure of fall-out in the event that assessors make recommendations.

With respect to the recent Meningococcal cases, the Government thanks our partners in General Practice, pharmacies, local Councils, and the media, who have all played a crucial role in delivering public health messages and rolling out the vaccination program.

The public can be assured that the Government's response to Meningococcal has been swift and developed on the expert advice of Public Health Services. The Meningococcal W vaccination program has already been a significant success, with over 43,000 vaccines distributed statewide and over 5000 vaccines delivered at the first public clinic at the Derwent Entertainment Centre.

The Government is mindful of the need to be cognisant and respond promptly to challenges within the health system as they emerge. I reiterate that we are committed to acting quickly when such challenges arise, with our capacity to do so strengthened by the Government's strong Budget position.

### **Health System Governance**

The first priority of the Government on returning to Parliament was to introduce and pass the *Tasmanian Health Service Act 2018* - the very first Bill passed by the new Parliament.

The Government undertook significant consultation with key stakeholders in delivering this change, which has now provided a strong foundation for the Tasmanian Health Service continue to grow and to improve the governance of the health system.

The Government will continue to work closely with our staff, key health stakeholders and unions, and we of course remain open to new ideas and innovative proposals for improvement. It is vital, however, that the system does not lose sight of the need for well planned and thoroughly consulted strategic direction that delivers over the longer term for Tasmanians.

In the public interest, the Government publicly released the NBIT Summary Report (Summary Report) in December 2017, which outlined the work undertaken by Deloitte and included key feedback from interviews and a survey of leaders and managers across the health system.

The Government subsequently released a response to the Summary Report which included an election commitment to strengthen local leadership and improve hospital governance.

The new arrangements under the *Tasmanian Health Service Act 2018* have already strengthened local hospital leadership and ensured greater clarity of roles and authority within the health system, which are in turn providing greater direction and more focus on improved governance and service planning.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you once again for providing me with an opportunity to submit further representations to the Sub-Committee.

It is important to be clear that the Government has never proclaimed or tried to pretend that the Tasmanian health system is fixed.

Rather, the health system is in a critical period of rebuilding and planning for the longer term.

The Government acknowledges the current demand pressures on acute services and is acting - providing more funding to recruit new nurses and support staff, and to improve patient flow and bed management.

The Government has confidence in our \$757 million plan to invest in new services, expanded capacity and better health infrastructure over the next six years, as well as to ensure a greater focus on planning for the long term.

The Tasmanian community deserves access to the best possible health care and that is exactly what the Government and the Tasmanian Health Service are working hard to deliver.

I trust that this submission will further assist the Sub-Committee with its deliberations and I welcome the opportunity for continued engagement.

Yours sincerely



Michael Ferguson MP  
**Minister for Health**

24 August 2018

- Enc.     1. Response to the Interim Report of the Acute Health Services Inquiry (Minister for Health)  
          2. Submission to the Acute Health Services Inquiry (Minister for Health), 31 August 2017  
          3. Submission to the Acute Health Services Inquiry (Minister for Health), 19 December 2017