HEALTHY TASMANIA
FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN – COMMUNITY CONSULTATION DRAFT
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UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA RESPONSE
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The University of Tasmania welcomes the release of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan – Community Consultation Draft. As articulated in the partnership agreement signed by the Government of Tasmania and University of Tasmania in August 2015 we have a ‘shared commitment to better educational outcomes and the State’s ongoing economic growth to make Tasmania attractive for investment, create jobs and build a modern economy, and to the State’s social and cultural development’. The University is fully supportive of the Government’s vision to make Tasmania the healthiest population in Australia by 2025 and, as a major partner of the Tasmanian Government, welcomes the discussion and consultation that will follow the release of this Consultation Draft.

The Consultation Draft acknowledges the role of the University, particularly through our research and health disciplinary expertise, in further developing the Healthy Tasmania Strategic Plan. The role of the University of Tasmania cannot be underestimated in supporting a Healthy Tasmania initiative. Working with the One State, One Health System, Better Outcomes (One Health System) the University can contribute to building and sustaining a culture of innovation and continuous performance improvement in an integrated Tasmanian health system.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

In principle, we support the identified principles, strategies and enablers for reform and acknowledge that a community-based approach to preventive health reform is critical for sustained improvement across the community. The Consultation Draft states ‘[t]he Tasmanian Government has identified a number of mechanisms that could be put in place to realign preventive health’ (s3.1). However, it is not yet clear how the government will gather up each of these ‘mechanisms’ to achieve this and present a coherent framework to support the planning and implementation of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan.

Owing to funding limitations, a new approach will need to draw on existing services and programs where these are deemed effective. The use of a ‘best buys’ (s3.1.2) approach involving cost-benefit analyses is strongly endorsed, however the importance of an evidence-based assessment methodology is fundamental.

Developing a holistic understanding of resources, services, and programs in place across the Tasmanian health system and community more widely which target or positively impact preventive health activities is an important first step in the development of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan. Consequently, we urge the Tasmanian Government to develop a community partnership framework that will enable the work currently occurring in Tasmania to be identified and inform the Strategic Plan. This framework must connect the network of providers – government, non-government and private – to identify, map and
assess existing services and programs. By identifying strengths, duplication and gaps in existing services and programs, and considering this within the context of the Consultation Draft’s identified principles, strategies and enablers and the proposed ‘best buys’ framework, a coherent, co-ordinated and efficient plan will ensue.

The University’s expertise in health service research could provide valuable input into the evaluation of existing services and programs, as well as into the design and evaluation of a ‘best buys’ framework.

SECTORS OTHER THAN HEALTH

Health literacy is identified in the Consultation Draft as the key enabler to improving the health of Tasmanians. Amongst the community it is widely acknowledged that an effective preventive health strategy must target the social determinants of health.

Consequently, the Consultation Draft’s recognition of the impact of sectors other than health on the health of the Tasmanian population is welcomed and the University is particularly supportive of the principle underlying the ‘health-in-all-policies’ approach. It would be beneficial to consider more broadly how sectors other than health can be engaged on an ongoing basis in contributing to preventive health strategies and initiatives.

The role of the education system, from early years onwards, is fundamental to developing health literacy and promoting health. Increased educational attainment positively impacts health outcomes and, as widely accepted, these factors are also positively correlated with socio-economic status. Related to this, Tasmania’s relatively poor retention rates between secondary, pre-tertiary and tertiary education is a significant barrier to achieving the Government’s vision and is an example of where cross-sectoral engagement is essential.

It is recommended that alongside the development of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan, the Tasmanian Government, working with the University of Tasmania, develop a position on how the social determinants of health within Tasmania are addressed. Amongst other factors, this should give detailed consideration to how the University, health and education sectors work together to enhance retention rates and further embed health literacy into early years and primary education. As indicated below, this whole of Government and inter-sectoral approach is critical to addressing the key priority areas of smoking and obesity prioritised in the Consultation Draft.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS: INCLUSIONS AND OMISSIONS

Addressing smoking, physical activity and nutrition as key priorities for the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan is supported by the University.

Poor nutrition and inactivity are arguably the biggest health problem facing Tasmanian children and adolescents with serious challenges in all age categories across the lifespan. Rapidly changing physical activity and food environments plus an increase in sedentary behaviours are major contributing factors to this problem which must be addressed through improving health lifestyles across the lifespan through physical activity, exercise and sport. Consequently, and in line with the approach outlined above, broad sectoral and community consultation and engagement is critical to addressing this priority.
The University strongly supports initiatives that reduce the uptake of smoking amongst younger people, smoking during pregnancy and smoking rates and encourage the Government to consider how such initiatives could be effectively progressed. We recommend the Government engage younger Tasmanians in a consultative process and are willing to be closely involved in this consultation owing to the high numbers of this demographic engaged with the University.

Two areas are noted as either omissions or lacking emphasis within the Consultation Draft: healthy ageing, and illicit drug and alcohol related health issues. Tasmania’s ageing population will place increasing significant pressure on the Tasmanian health system in years to come and has a negative and sizable impact on the Tasmanian Government’s ability to achieve its vision for the health of the Tasmanian population.

Health related issues relating to the use of illicit drugs and alcohol are a growing national health problem. Recent media reports have highlighted public concern regarding illicit drug use in the north-west of Tasmania, however health related issues relating to illicit drug use are not specific to this region of Tasmania and neither are the health related issues of north-western Tasmanians sufficiently encapsulated in this one area of concern. The high proportion of Tasmanians living in regional and remote areas of Tasmania emphasises the role of the social determinants of health in the health outcomes of Tasmanians. Evidence indicates that residents of regional areas have higher levels of alcohol consumption than urban residents. These factors, and other socially determined factors, combine to have a significant and negative impact on the health of Tasmanians. The University believes this justifies greater emphasis in future iterations of the Strategic Plan.

The Consultation Draft focuses primarily on primary prevention. Although mention is given to secondary and tertiary prevention, offering improved services and programs which target secondary prevention limit the cascading of disease which has both a negative impact on an individual’s health and the system more widely. Greater recognition of this is recommended.

COLLABORATION ON WORKFORCE STRATEGY

For the Tasmanian Government to implement the proposed changes, significant workforce planning and design will need to be undertaken. New skills, or even new roles, in the workforce may be required.

The University is a critical partner to the Tasmanian health system in workforce strategy. Our stake in this is both as the key institution in the education and training of Tasmania’s health workforce and as a partner in creating a culture of research and health service improvement within the health system.

Through our Associate Degree initiative we will offer new course delivery and health service responsiveness particularly in the areas of health and community services. Working in partnership with the Tasmanian Health Service (THS) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the University can create a teaching, research and training culture that
attracts and develops clinical leadership across the entire health system, including social services.

Evidence demonstrates a common feature of world class health systems is the presence of joint appointments across service provision and universities. If Tasmanians are to become the healthiest Australians our health leaders must be deeply engaged in clinical redesign, cultural transformation in an environment which supports health services, research and education.

The University can work with the State to create an environment which will attract, support and retain a contemporary health workforce. We propose this to be an important aspect of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan.

In closing, the University is fully supportive of the Tasmanian Government’s intentions in delivering the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan – Community Consultation Draft. As a major stakeholder and partner we look forward to being fully engaged in the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan.