20 February 2015
One Health System
Department of Health and Human Services
GPO Box 125
Hobart TAS 7001

Submission – Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services

The Cradle Coast Authority is the regional body created by the nine northwest Tasmanian Councils to deal with issues of regional significance, including improvement of regional health care and planning.

The Authority is making a submission in response to the Green Paper Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services, noting that individual councils from the region may also make contributions.

A fundamental objective of the Authority is to pursue the improvement of ‘liveability’ in the region, not only to maintain and support the existing population but to support viable and sustainable growth. To many residents both old and new, access to local health care and the retention of the service infrastructure that provides this is a threshold for the liveability of the region.

The key principles the Authority believes must be highlighted are that access to critical care and post-operative care in the region – particularly at the two major sites in Burnie and Latrobe – must be maintained. The Cradle Coast region already has the highest average mortality for heart and cardiovascular disease and lung cancer in the State, and the highest number of standard surgery consultations according to the Tas Medicare Local Primary Health Indicators report 2012. The region also ranks poorly in many other significant health indicators.

The Authority is reassured that the Minister for Health has publicly stated that the hospitals in Burnie and Latrobe will not be closed as a consequence of the health reform process underpinned by the Green Paper. The future of these services is a key concern for the Authority and its membership. The ‘one hospital – two campus’ model should enable the continued provision of general medical and surgical services, emergency department care, mental health, subacute care, and end-of-life care in the region.

The key premise of the Green Paper is “access to better care”, a commendable and sensible starting point for a review of critical services for the Tasmanian community.

Any reforms to the health system, particularly for a dispersed but sizeable regional population such as the North-West, must be underpinned by –

- Access – efficient, accessible and convenient transportation services for all people requiring care and health services not available in their local area;
- Equity – ensuring all Tasmanians have access to the best services possible, and are not disadvantaged by their geographical location;
- Security - does not jeopardise the delivery of high quality health services across the whole region by weakening the critical mass required to do so.
The people of the Cradle Coast region are already required to travel much more than those in other regions, as evidenced in Table 1.1 of the Green Paper, with 32% receiving care outside their region, compared to 1.4% and 6.7% in the South and North respectively (not including rural facilities). The aim of the reform should be to help balance this current inequity wherever possible for high frequency and critical care services.

The option to bring specialists to patients, rather than requiring patients to specialists, should be explored and implemented where it is clinically possible. For example consulting or check-up visits work easily where specialised equipment in a fixed location is not necessarily required. It must be said that this is a model which is familiar to many already.

The cost of delivering non-critical specialist services on a roster in regional centres needs to be weighed against the collective cost and impact on patients and the community. There is also an option for the North-West to become the location for some services not currently offered where patients in other regions can access services offered in a more timely way.

Where it is clinically proven that the best outcomes are delivered by services located in either Launceston General or Royal Hobart, access to efficient and effective transport services and clinical support must be enhanced for the North-West. A comprehensive and effective communications plan to ensure all sections of the community are able to access information on transport and clinical options is critical to ensuring medical care is maintained and enhanced for the region. This is particularly important for areas such as the West Coast where transport services are a consistent issue due to a lack of frequency and access to the areas where health services are located.

Consideration of enhanced tele-consulting services needs to be considered to minimise travel and social impacts for specialist consultations. The increased use of tele-health must also be explored and any barriers to this removed.

They key principles of “placing patients first” and “providing holistic, evidence-based health services” (p17) must be the drivers of the reform to provide “access to better services”. If this can be improved by limiting the number of sites at which some services are provided then this should be supported.

The provision of services in a public-private partnership should be explored – if it can be guaranteed that this won’t over time be allowed to see services diminish, particularly in regional areas which may not be as remunerative or, to do with health providers recovering extra funds, for increased costs to be incurred by Tasmanians living in regional areas.

The provision of rural hospital services in the regions must also be considered carefully. The delivery of emergency care in areas such as Circular Head, the West Coast and King Island is essential and must be maintained to support the ongoing viability of these important economic areas.

The reform of the health system, particularly in the North-West, must not be allowed to impact upon the operations and success of the Rural Clinical School, which has proven to be very effective in bolstering the rural health workforce in areas like the Cradle Coast.

The improvement of general health and wellbeing along with reductions in chronic conditions through preventative intervention measures is a principle that the Authority is committed to advocating for the region. The ability of Local Government to be effective in the area of health
promotion and early intervention should be recognised and supported. An example such as the Authority’s successful delivery of the Healthy Communities Initiative provides evidence that this type of investment to improve the health of the general population can reduce the overall health budget if implemented effectively. The Authority calls on the Government to enhance the resources available to delivery preventative health programs.

The Authority commends the medical and allied health professionals for their commitment to providing such essential services to the community. The Authority supports the Government’s initiative to improve and enhance the systems and practices that support our professionals as part of its reform review.

The Authority on behalf of its member councils will be extending a formal invitation to the Minister to participate in a coordinated meeting with the region’s Councils during the White Paper consultation period to gain a regional perspective on this important area of reform.

Yours Sincerely

Brett Smith
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CC:
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Mayor Daryl Quilliam, Circular Head Council
Mayor Steve Martin, Devonport City Council
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