

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

[onehealthsystem@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:onehealthsystem@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

## Submission by the Tasmanian Labor Party to the Green Paper

The Labor Party is pleased to provide a submission to the *Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services Green Paper* issued by the Government.

This submission aims to provide an overview of the key areas the Labor Party sees as critical for a safe and effective health care system in Tasmania. It is the Labor Party's belief that a robust and well resourced universal health care system is the ideal framework around which to build other levels of integrated care.

The Labor Party acknowledges that we need to address the causes of ill health through health promotion, prevention and early intervention activity if we are to effectively and systematically improve the health of Tasmanians. We welcome the emphasis on the importance of primary health care in the Green Paper.

The Labor Party encourages the Government to continue to consult meaningfully with the Tasmanian public about its plans for health reform. When further details are known about the types of changes that can be expected every effort should be made to seek feedback from Tasmanians about what these changes mean for them, their families and their communities.

If you would like further information about this submission please contact the Tasmanian Parliamentary Labor Party on 6212 2127.

Kind regards



Rebecca White MP  
Labor Shadow Minister for Health

## **Green Paper Response**

### **Tertiary Health/ Hospital Care**

The provision of safe and sustainable clinical services in the Tasmanian hospital system has always been a key goal of the Labor Party. Achieving the balance between local access, quality, safety, and sustainability of the hospital system has been for some time, and remains a significant challenge for any government.

The Labor Party has demonstrated its commitment to achieving this goal since the formation of an expert advisory group in 2003 to examine the tertiary health system in Tasmania which resulted in the implementation of recommendations of the Richardson Report.

This was followed in 2007 with the Labor Government's launch of Tasmania's Health Plan, which was a far-reaching, comprehensive and innovative plan for Tasmania's health system.

In 2013 the Labor Government initiated Tasmania's Health Planning Framework was published, formulated by the Tasmanian Lead Clinicians Group (TLCG) and both the Labor Government and Liberal Party committed it would be maintained. Included in the remit of the TLCG was the requirement to revisit Tasmania's original Health Plan six years after it was originally published in order to develop a new planning framework and strategic direction for our health system, such that a 'living' health plan was established.

The current Green Paper, in fact, represents not a new plan but a continuation of what was an ongoing process of health reform initiated by the Labor Party.

The original Health Plan provided clear focus on service delivery, redesign and delineation of services, as did the recommendations of the Richardson Report, with an emphasis on integration to support a seamless journey for the patient. The Labor Party continues to maintain these aims.

As identified by the TLCG in Tasmania's Health Planning Framework:

The original Health Plan 2007-08 had an impact on the delivery of health, human service reform and hospital and health facility investment. Higher profile outcomes included:

- ☐ The Mersey, Launceston and North West Regional Hospital Redevelopments.

- ☐ GP Super Clinics agreements with the Australian Government.
- ☐ Installation and support of high tech hospital equipment at the Royal Hobart Hospital and Launceston General Hospital.
- ☐ Rural community health and Ambulance station redevelopments.
- ☐ General increases in buildings and infrastructure investment.
- ☐ Telehealth investment increases.
- ☐ Integrated Care Centre developments.
- ☐ Support for Rural General Practice.
- ☐ Primary and population health promotion.
- ☐ Patient transport and accommodation improvements.
- ☐ Partnerships with the University of Tasmania.
- ☐ Workforce sustainability initiatives.

Less well-known initiatives included the investment in more nursing staff; increased allied health in the North of the State; a hospital equipment fund; ambulance and patient transport service improvements; smoking cessation measures; increased funding for dental services, an increase in information technology resources and development of the Statewide Rural Emergency Response Framework (SWERF).

Providing public health services to Tasmania is a network of 4 major hospitals and 23 rural and community hospitals/multi purpose centres. Service provision includes acute and sub acute inpatient beds, day surgery/treatments, primary health care, residential aged care and emergency care. The Labor Party believes that this network provides an important foundation for increasing access to services and reducing duplication of services. Labor is committed to improving models of service delivery to provide better care to more people.

Labor remains committed to strengthening the links between the acute hospitals, rural hospitals, providers of primary health services, aged care, private hospitals, mental health and disability services. Better linkage means better utilisation of acute and sub acute beds, better transition of care from one provider to another without delays or lack of appropriate information relating to the health plan of patients and reduction of representations to Emergency Departments.

The reliance upon acute care services for patients will decrease when the significant issue of the social determinates of health and wellness are fully understood and addressed by the current government, in a whole of government approach. A whole of Government approach is required due to the fact that most of the social determinates of health are outside of the health department's responsibility.

The Labor Party urges the Liberal Government to consider and implement the recommendations of *A Thriving Tasmania* report from the Ministerial Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council (2013). This is an important document when considering action on the social determinates of health and one that was initiated by the Labor Party when in government.

As identified in the executive summary of the report:

Tackling the social determinants of health will require coordinated and sustained effort from the many parts of Tasmanian society that can build the conditions to keep Tasmanians healthy and well. All sectors of government, business and the community have a role to play because health and wellbeing is strongly driven by social and economic factors.

The Labor Party acknowledges that all health professionals are working hard to deliver the best possible care to patients but without addressing the causes of ill health the task is difficult and unsustainable.

## **Ambulance Services and Emergency Care**

Ambulance Tasmania (AT) provides integrated, high quality, pre-hospital emergency and medical care, patient transport, community transport and medical retrieval services to the Tasmanian community. This is achieved through permanent paramedics, volunteer officers and operational support services.

When in government the Labor Party undertook significant investment in ambulance and emergency services. These resources need to be maintained and preferably enhanced, in the face of increasing workload pressures. The value of highly trained paramedics needs to be recognised by increasing their deployment across the state to enhance AT's emergency response capacity which frequently is time critical.

Discussion has occurred in the Green Paper about hospital avoidance programs but does not recognise the invaluable role AT provides in hospital avoidance and alternatives to Emergency Department overcrowding.

Two initiatives undertaken during the term of the Labor Government were the First Responder trial and the Extended Care Practitioner role. Both initiatives showed excellent results for hospital avoidance and enhanced out of hospital care. Labor is encouraging the Liberal Government to review the data and reactivate these initiatives and extend these roles statewide.

## **Preventative Health and Health Promotion**

The Tasmanian Parliamentary Labor Party has a strong history of supporting Preventative Health and Health promotion services in Tasmania. The evidence and experience from our work shows that the policies and programs aimed at behavior change, measured across a

population, take many years through which efforts must be sustained and responsive. We would encourage the Tasmanian Liberal Government to draw on this knowledge and experience to expand and continue such efforts and thus continue to build on a preventive health system that will deliver improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all Tasmanians.

The Tasmanian Parliamentary Labor Party (Labor Party) is extremely disappointed with the Abbott Government's budget cuts of \$368 million to the National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health, including the abolishment of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency and the Preventive Research Fund. The Abbott Government cuts along with the Tasmanian Liberal Government Hodgman cuts of \$210.4 million will have a devastating impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for all Tasmanians.

Given the multiple social determinants of health, it is clear that a prevention agenda requires cross sectoral, multilevel interventions that extend beyond the health sector into sectors such as housing, welfare, justice, immigration, employment, agriculture, education, family and community services, Indigenous affairs and communications. There are many positive changes that individuals and families can make, but if the environment in which they exist – where they work, live and play, interact and experience life – is not conducive to good health, the impact of individual behaviours may be severely limited.

Tasmanian's future depends on our ability to tackle long-term health challenges and this will require extensive changes to meet demands of increased rates of chronic disease and an ageing population. The Labor Party is committed to this challenge. Labor understands health affects everything we do – how we work, the time spent with our family and loved ones and what we do in our spare time. Good health boosts productivity and improves workplace participation. A healthy state will deliver a stronger economy.

One of the greatest public health challenges confronting Australia and many other industrialised countries is the obesity epidemic. Australia is one of the most overweight developed nations, with over 60% of adults and one in four children overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight and obesity has been steadily increasing over the last 30 years. Obesity is particularly prevalent among men and women in the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups, people without post-school qualifications, Indigenous Australians and among many people born overseas.

Obesity is a relatively new area for prevention globally. There is no simple solution or singular approach. These factors speak to a 'learning by doing' approach – that is, the staged trialing of a package of interventions accompanied by good monitoring and evaluation. Behavior change is an essential component of any response to obesity; however, this is a

complex process for individuals that extend beyond education and the provision of information.

The Labor Party recognises we need a far greater focus on prevention and wellbeing. Keeping people well and out of hospital will deliver not only benefits to individuals but the entire health system. Achieving long-term, sustainable change is essential for Governments needing to use existing resources more effectively.

## **Primary Health**

The benefits of a strong primary health care system are well documented. There is international evidence that countries with a well developed primary care system have healthier populations and reduced health care costs. In particular much of the success relies on a well integrated system that is adaptive and flexible and has the capacity to respond to changing needs and emerging models of care.

While maintaining the current service model, Tasmania is already experiencing significant difficulties in the viability of some of its smaller services. Future workforce challenges threaten our capacity to maintain these services into the future. Our primary health care services, as they are currently structured and funded, are not able to provide the range of services now needed especially in the prevention, early detection and community based management of chronic disease.

Tasmania's major challenges in delivering primary health care include ageing of the health workforce, strong competition for the available workforce nationally and internationally, distribution of workforce with a concentration in urban areas and shortages in rural and regional communities. Our primary health services need to work cooperatively with other community-based services, allied health services and our public hospitals to provide integrated, quality care in the most appropriate service locations whilst maintaining accessibility for all Tasmanians.

The Labor Party encourages the Government to provide primary health care that is socially appropriate, universally accessible, a suitably trained workforce comprised of multi-disciplinary teams supported by integrated referral systems in a way that: gives priority to those most in need and addresses health inequalities; maximises community and individual self-reliance, participation and control; and involves collaboration and partnership with other sectors to promote public health.

Social determinants of health strongly influence the health of individuals and communities, and affect the sustainability and accessibility of health services. It is therefore important that primary health service planning and delivery recognises the influence that factors such

as housing, education, employment, infrastructure and transport can have on the health of those who live in the community, and build partnerships across sectors when there is a need to address specific issues affecting a community.

The primary health care system needs to be better designed towards supporting the patient, their family and carer(s) to have control and actively supported in decision making regarding their care. For many individuals, the primary health care services they access and the quality of care they receive is influenced as much by where they live, their cultural background, and social and economic circumstances.

The Labor Party understands that people prefer to be cared for within their own homes and communities whenever possible and this requires an emphasis upon high quality integrated care that will allow primary health care practitioners and hospital based specialists to provide in home care.

This requires some major changes in how we plan and deliver primary health care in Tasmania. Our health care professionals also need to look at new ways of working with consumers and with other providers so they can better meet the needs of the people in their care. The Government needs to provide appropriate funding to support a strong and effective primary health care sector to achieve better health outcomes for all Tasmanians.

## **Community Health**

Tasmania's health system continues to experience increased demand for services. This increase is in line with a number of key factors including the increased incidence of chronic and complex conditions, primary due to Tasmania's ageing population. Improving access to the existing network of Community Health Services (CHSs) throughout the State is an important aspect of providing the best possible care for Tasmanians within their community.

The Labor Party recognises the demand pressures that Community Health Services experience and appreciates the challenge in meeting these demands.

Community Health Services are an integral part of a broader health system that faces major challenges. The Labor Party believes future policy direction need to place the needs of consumers as central in developing an organised and integrated health care system that provides consumers access to services when and where they need them.

Tasmania is a dynamic and culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse State, with a long history of migration. Today, more than 57,650 people, or 11.6 per cent of the Tasmanian population, were born overseas, while over 24 per cent of Tasmanians, or 113,969 people, have one or both parents born overseas. In total, Tasmania has residents from over 170 countries, with 24 religions and over 75 languages spoken. CHSs play a critical role in providing health service for migrants regardless of the reason for migration or when they arrived. The Labor Party encourages government to seek consultation to ensure CHSs are adequately resourced to provide migrant health services throughout the State.

The successful delivery of Community Health Services requires fair and equitable access to services based on equal access across the state for equal needs, with disadvantaged people provided priority access to reduce the inequality in health status. Consistency of practices in measuring and managing demand, providing improved data that can be used for benchmarking, service planning and adequate funding allocation are all required.

It will be important to work together, individuals and families, communities, health services, non government organisations, industry and governments need to all be actively engaged and to agree on priorities to ensure our CHSs can continue to provide better health outcomes for Tasmanians.

## **Mental Health**

The Tasmanian Labor Party has a proud history of delivering high quality accessible mental health service across Tasmania, however there is always more work to be done. During our time in government we provided in excess of a \$100 million of dedicated funding for a range of mental health services and initiatives for children and adolescents, adults and older persons across the state.

In 2011-12, 15% of the Tasmanian population reported having been diagnosed with a mental health or behavioural problem at some time in their life (compared with 13.6% for Australia). Just like physical health and fitness, mental health is important to take care of and improve. This is true for people suffering from mental illness, but also for those who are at risk and for those who need to maintain good mental health.

The Labor Party believes developing our understanding of mental health and mental illness, by supporting people with a mental illness and by taking actions in our community and workplaces that support mental health and wellbeing will build a more sustainable mental health response



Since the development of the National Mental Health Strategy in 1992, which has been reaffirmed by health ministers a number of times since, the perspectives of those with a lived experience of mental illness has informed the state, national and international policy direction of mental health services. This lived experience provides a unique viewpoint that must be considered in all decisions shaping the delivery of our mental health services.

The Labor party would encourage the Government to build on this work and importantly ensure those who live with mental illness are central to the development of mental health policy. In acknowledging and accepting the centrality of people with lived experience in their own recovery, mental health services seek to create environments enabling people to direct their own lives and meet the needs they have identified.

Anxiety disorders and depression are the most common mental health disorders, affecting approximately 9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively, of the adult population each year. Collectively referred to as ‘high prevalence’ illnesses, these disorders include diverse conditions (for example, post traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia, obsessive compulsive disorder and depression), with differing treatment requirements and outcomes. It is these disorders, in mild to moderate severity, that the evidence shows can be effectively treated through online programs.

Research in Australia and internationally shows that outcomes for those who participate in online therapies are broadly comparable to those of face to face services using similar treatment techniques. Further investment into e-health and e-mental health services is required to deliver appropriate services and the opportunity to engage professional, online and telephone support is essential to assist people with mental health disorders.

The Tasmanian Labor believes early intervention and prevention health practices, primary health, community health, education and community awareness are essential in guiding our Mental Health Services in the future.

## **E-health and telehealth**

Most health sites across the state now have tele-health facilities but they are not as well utilised as they could be. The Government needs to work to improve the understanding of health care professionals about the capacity in regional hospitals and community health centres to provide telehealth services and patient care where the patient lives. Increasing the use of tele-health will assist patient's access some appointments without travelling which will enhance their options for accessing care.

The use of video conferencing for staff meetings and professional development in the health sector should be actively encouraged and supported. The use of technology has the

potential to save time and money whilst linking our health system with best practice models from around the world.

The Government should continue to transition to electronic health records which will aid the smooth transfer of patient information between all levels of health care and ensure timely and accurate information is available when treating patients.

## **Drug and Alcohol**

The tragedy of alcohol and drug abuse is wide spread touching many Tasmanians in some way with the negative consequences of harmful consumption/use. Individuals with an addiction continue to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in ways that cause significant physical, psychological or social harm to themselves or others.

Approximately one in five Tasmanians over the age of 14 drinks at short term risk or high risk levels at least once a month. The same rate of Tasmanians smoke daily or on a regular basis; and about one in eight Tasmanians aged 14 and over have recently used an illicit drug. The demand for substances and the resulting harm of their use and misuse is a significant burden on the community, impacting on the health and hospitals system, on policing, the judicial system, on the correction system, on workplace productivity, on our roads and streets and in our homes. The effects are also felt in schools with children who smoke, drink and take drugs starting younger and children are being affected by alcohol, tobacco and other drug use in the family.

Efforts to deal with substance use related issues have largely been focussed on treating people once they become unwell. There are laws and significant investment directed at controlling supply and to deal with the harm and impact of substance use, however, not enough is being done to manage the reasons behind demand.

The Labor Party supports promotion, prevention and early intervention to complement the broad range of actions, activities and initiatives developed by the Labor Party in the past term of Government. This pathway will deliver better outcomes for individuals, families and communities who are impacted by the use and misuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. We recognise that there is more work to be done and urge Government to invest further to address alcohol and drug abuse, with a need for more rehabilitation services throughout the state, increased access to inpatient withdrawal, increased capacity of the sector and further investment into alcohol and drugs prevention campaigns.

No single government agency or the Government alone will be able to achieve systematic and cultural change in relation to misuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and improve the health and wellbeing of the broader Tasmanian community on its own. The challenge for Government is to provide strategic leadership to ensure a coordinated and systematic approach to achieve the required systematic, cultural and service system changes.

Tasmania has a relatively small, ageing and regionally dispersed population. It has one of the most regionally dispersed populations of any state and has the highest proportion of welfare dependent households of all states and territories at 34 per cent. Socio-economic disadvantage has been associated with harm such as foetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol and drug disorders, hospital admissions due to diagnoses related to alcoholism, lung cancer, drug overdoses and alcohol-related assault.

Although the socio-economic status does not in itself represent the level of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use or the associated problems, there is strong link between a person's socio-economic status and their level of health and wellbeing. The socio-economic status presents a significant challenge in delivering equitable, universal health and human services.

This is compounded by the ever increasing cost of living, which is placing an added burden on Tasmanian households that will have a cumulative effect on an individual's and a family's health and wellbeing. Dealing with increasing cost of living increases the risk of mental health problems such as depression, alcohol use disorders and suicide.

Beyond the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, harmful consumption also impacts significantly across a diverse range of other areas, including workforce productivity, healthcare services such as hospitals and ambulances, road accidents, law enforcement, neighbourhood amenity, property damage and insurance administration.

The Labor Party strongly supports building an inclusive community. Socially inclusive communities are critical, they foster resilience in individuals and families and help individuals cope and adapt to change and negative events more easily. Socially inclusive communities and resilient individuals are less likely to engage in substance misuse.

The Labor Party supports an evidence based strategy for dealing with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to achieve this increased level of consumer engagement in the social service and health settings to better understand client needs to shape a response that will work. The Government needs to consider ways in which funding is disbursed and how policies are developed to allow for greater flexibility, consideration on broader social determinants and future demands.