



ABN 96 017 131 248

Georges Bay Esplanade, St Helens
PO Box 21, St Helens Tasmania 7216

T: (03) 6376 7900 F: (03) 6376 1551

E: admin@bodctas.gov.au

W: www.bodctas.gov.au

Our Ref:

Enquiries: Angela Matthews

15 May 2015

Minister Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Health
Level 4, 111 Macquarie Street
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Minister Ferguson MP,

Please find enclosed Break O'Day Council's submission to the Exposure Draft of the White Paper for Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services.

Yours faithfully



John Brown
GENERAL MANAGER

from the **mountains** to the **sea**





ONE STATE, ONE HEALTH SYSTEM BETTER OUTCOMES

*RESPONSE TO THE TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT
EXPOSURE DRAFT WHITE PAPER*



MAY 2015

Introduction

Summary

Break O’Day Council submits further comment, questions and suggestions in response to the State Government’s White Paper - Exposure Draft, March 2015. We note that the State Government’s vision is to be in the position of ensuring that Tasmanians will enjoy the status of the healthiest population in Australia by 2025. While it is noted that the State Government plans a range of structural, procedural and service delivery changes, it would seem that **a vision for rapid improvement in health outcomes would also require more emphasis on processes within communities** (where the illnesses occur) in addition to the material aspects of change.

The White Paper states that ‘action is needed that focuses on the complex causes of poor health. Much of what influences health status...lies outside of the control of the health sector’ (Page 13).

Health workers see the results of complex causes of poor health with clients every day. Every encounter/appointment/interaction with a client invariably provides an opportunity to assist in a positive shift related to social determinants and health outcomes.

With appropriate shift in emphasis and effective collaboration many positive changes could be realized even though they are seemingly ‘outside the control of the health sector’.

Many comments in this response pertain to a range of social determinants of health, to health literacy and health promotion. A number of other comments pertain to issues not mentioned or highlighted in the White Paper but are relevant to the long term health of Break O’Day residents.

Social Determinants of Health

The Social Determinants of Health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels (World Health Organisation 2013) The World Health Organisation (WHO) feels so strongly with regard to the importance of social determinants it is included in its post 2015 development agenda and tackling social determinants globally has been identified as a fundamental approach to the work of that organisation. ([www.who.int.social_determinants](http://www.who.int/social_determinants))

Social determinants of health need to be seriously considered and factored in any final decisions on health systems. The social determinants of health that most keenly affect the Break O'Day communities are transport, ageing population, mental health, nutrition and access to allied and non-direct health services including recreation/physical activities.

Issues

Transport and Accommodation

As outlined in our response to the Green Paper residents of **Break O'Day** experience **severe difficulties with access to transport for medical services**. Adequate transport is required, not only for attendance at hospital and specialist medical appointments, but also for a wide range of allied health services.

We reiterate that transport opportunities must be available in sufficient numbers and delivered at convenient times and places throughout the local government area, for both clients and their carers.

While elective surgery at the Mersey Hospital makes economic sense, we have concerns relating to how transport and accommodation issues will be addressed for residents of this region.

Discharge from hospital, surgery or other service must include **seamless planning that takes into consideration the return journey for the client and their carer or support person**. To be effective, staff at discharge points will need relevant information and understanding of transport options and other considerations pertinent to a resident of the Break O'Day region.

In addition to the transport concerns for the clients there are important issues for carers including loss of wages and impact on employment through lost work time. It is not clear from the White Paper if all transport and accommodation costs will be met for carers and support persons. It is crucial that such issues are resolved and that barriers such as transport and out of pocket expenses do not result in people cancelling elective surgeries and other treatments or services.

Ageing Population - extraordinary demographics

Break O'Day ranks the third lowest on the Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) with only Brighton and George Town with lower scores. (SEIFA comparison: Hobart - 497, West Tamar 391, Glamorgan/Spring Bay 100, Break O'Day 48. ABS Census 2011) While younger people and families are moving away to find work, older Australians are drawn to the tranquility and relaxed lifestyle available in the Break O'Day area. While the Australian median age is 37 and Tasmania as a whole averages 40 years, Break O'Day residents have a median age of 50 (ABS Census data 2012). ABS social profiling indicates further increases in the median age for the Break O'Day area over the next twenty years.

This **rapid and continuing change in the demographics of the East Coast has already resulted in a noticeable increase in demand for health services** (reported by a range of service providers). The potential for further increases in health issues and demand for health services in the future cannot be overstated. The age disparity in Break O'Day will continue to have an impact on the rate and development of chronic diseases, morbidity caused by ageing, the need for transport to and from health services and exacerbate the difficulties with the recruitment of volunteers for that transport.

This **extraordinary demographic information should be taken into consideration when planning future services** for the Break O'Day area.

Mental Health Services

There are **inadequate mental health services in Break O’Day and elsewhere on the East Coast**. A range of service providers working in hospitals, health centres, in non-government agencies and community houses report significant increases in demand for mental health support over the past two years. They also indicate the **likelihood of increases in the demand for mental health services in the foreseeable future**.

Short periods of hospitalisation in Launceston are available for persons requiring acute episodic care. Persons with a mental health issue, however, **need to receive regular professional support in their communities to minimise the likelihood of repeat hospitalisations**. Repeat hospitalisations are very distressing for the client and their family as well as being a significant cost burden for State services such as Police, Ambulance, medical staff and the hospital system.

To ensure that the best possible care is provided to persons with post and non acute mental health conditions there needs to be effective discharge and care plans, robust attention to the recruitment and retention of professional State Government workers and effective collaboration with non-Government agencies. The non-government sector regularly receives referrals to provide post acute care for mental health clients. There is **growing angst in the community that many non-government agencies are not providing a level of support that is effective for clients in the Break O’Day area**.

While a number of service providers in the Break O’Day region, including the State Government, have a mental health focus and strategy, **retention of staff is an ongoing issue**. There have been difficulties filling worker positions for example Break O’Day Council provided a vehicle for a mental health professional however the position was not filled for eighteen months. With low numbers of persons employed in mental health support, across all agencies, **consideration must be given to ensuring all temporary and short term staff absences of State Government workers are promptly back-filled**.

Families also need considerable support, both practical and emotional as the ongoing care of persons with a mental health condition invariably rests in the long term with family members.

How will adequate long term mental health support be provided in the Break O’Day community?

The Mental Health Council puts forward a collaborative and comprehensive alternative to ad hoc and acute episodic care for persons with a mental health issue, a program called

Rethink. Such a 'whole of person, whole of life' focus would ultimately save money and undoubtedly the lives of many people who often suffer unnecessarily.

Good nutrition and changing lifestyle choices

Local, targeted campaigns pertaining to gardens, good food, nutrition and education for parents are important considerations to bring about lasting change in lifestyle patterns. There have been notable increases in the number of breakfast clubs in schools, school gardens, community gardens and families (sometimes with assistance from a community organisation) rediscovering the home vegetable plot. This is a recent positive trend that could be taken advantage of by community and Government workers.

Nutritional habits, positive or negative are well formed in early childhood. Family Food Patch utilising volunteer parents has had considerable success in other parts of Tasmania, particularly in rural areas. **Further training made available to rural parents would ensure valuable nutritional information is passed on to their peers.** When run in conjunction with community/neighbourhood houses this information can reach those 'hard to engage families'.

The Eat Well/Move Well program is mentioned in the White Paper however there is limited take up of this program across the State. **An initiative to highlight, promote and provide incentive for schools, child care centres and playgroups to conduct this program would be highly advantageous** to the early learning and development of youngsters and their families.

A dietician employed by the State Government, based in the local area, could coordinate and disseminate information on community gardens, provide nutritional advice, advise school canteens, organise local cooking and gardening classes. All these activities could be undertaken collaboratively with a range of community service providers including schools, child care centres, libraries, health centres, neighbourhood and community houses plus the Child and Family Centre.

Physical Activity

Adequate physical activity is also a fundamental requirement for good health. **Service providers throughout the region agree that there are many barriers to adequate participation.** Barriers include the lack of suitable venues/walking paths, cost, the dispersed population, lack of understanding of the health benefits of activity and the loss of many sporting clubs/team sports. The cost of accessing some venues e.g. swimming pools

at public schools is prohibitive to many residents. There would be both short and long term health benefits if access to such facilities were subsidised by the State Government.

While local organisations can build motivation and skills at a local level there needs to be appropriate pathways to necessary interventions. **The State Government has a vital role to play in establishing such appropriate pathways for referral and support.**

Will the State Government ensure there are professional resources available within the local communities, such as exercise physiologists, physiotherapists, diabetes educators and at least one dietician?

In addition the work of 'on the ground' community workers needs to be well supported by State Government health promotion campaigns through a variety of media.

Primary Care Systems

It would be an advantage to have a Primary Care Coordinator on the East Coast to ensure there are adequate allied health services and to liaise with Government and non-Government service providers. Such coordination would identify gaps in essential services, inadequate service delivery as well as any duplication. Inadequate service delivery is specifically mentioned as there have been numerous and recent reports of new service providers (often those who have head offices in other States) failing to provide adequate service coverage in the Break O'Day region.

It is of vital importance that persons discharged from hospital and also those with complex chronic conditions have comprehensive Care Plans in place. Will there be assurances that all recommendations for support and services within Care Plans will be available in the local area (e.g. allied health services and support workers)?

Health Literacy and E-Health

Health literacy pertains to understanding and acting on information. Prior to this however, community members need to know how to access health information, then how to read and interpret the information. After this the person needs to know how, when and where to act on the information they have gained. **Health literacy is therefore integral to positive and improved health outcomes across communities.**

How will the State Government ensure that any information provided for the community regarding health services will be adequately distributed, displayed and explained to the community in ways that will be unequivocally equitable and understood by persons with varying literacy skills?

The most effective use of the e-Health medium will require comprehensive training made available and undertaken on three tiers - for the practitioner, community service provider and client. Support, particularly for a client who has had little or no exposure to this type of communication, will be integral to the increased utilisation of e-health services in Break O'Day.

Health Promotion

The community needs to be empowered and enabled to learn about, consider and make positive, healthy life choices. Personal choice is cultural and familial with positive and negative life choices handed down through generations of families. The development of personal skills and the willingness to learn new skills usually comes from work at a grass roots level. While workers and organisations in local communities can engage with and implement a range of health promotion activities support from State Government is vital. **State Government collaboration is necessary to ensure there are effective referral pathways, sufficient health promotion workers where and when they are required, plus effective information in various forms - in short, the best possible supportive environment for change.**

Support for Two East Coast Hospitals

Break O'Day local government area has a case for **special consideration to leave unchanged the number of hospital beds and to receive an increase in ambulance services, the number of paramedics, allied health workers and oral health services.** Break O'Day has more adults who smoke daily (18.6%), drink alcohol at lifetime risk levels and who have insufficient physical exercise (31.4%) than the Tasmanian average. Break O'Day residents also show significantly higher rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations and a significantly higher rate of potentially avoidable deaths at 261.4 per 100,000. Providing efficient, timely and appropriate information regarding services would be only one element of an effective health system. **The hospitals/health centres at St**

Marys and St Helens are hubs for information, services and support and these would be ideal locations for the dissemination of information and provision of support.

It is noted that in the past some services have been withdrawn or threatened to be withdrawn because of poor communication and/or inappropriate promotion. This has resulted in the community's limited knowledge of the service and resulted in a lack of referrals to the service. This has been evident with podiatry and mental health support. (Health Indicators of Tasmania 2013)

Being able to access post operative care in either St Marys or St Helens district centres remains of vital importance. Post operative, post natal or medical care close to home increases quality of care, aids recovery times and reintegration to the home. Providing increased rehabilitative, post surgical, quality wound care services in local areas will reduce repeat admissions to larger hospitals.

Will the State Government be maintaining the number of hospital beds in each venue plus increasing the hours for allied health services and Community Nursing when necessary?

Conclusion

Substantial improvements to the health of Tasmanians in the next ten years will only come from the significant commitment of all community sectors and three tiers of Government. Central to that commitment will be the close attention to the Social Determinants of Health, the basis of ill health and disadvantage. **While local government is already a significant contributor to the health environment they require committed and collaborative support including the provision of allied health professionals and the maintenance of sufficient staff at the two hospitals/health centres.**

Given the rapidly ageing population in the Break O'Day area there will need to be ongoing and additional support provided by the State Government.

Break O'Day residents will require an improved effective transport system for clients and carers, regardless of the venue for their health service. The community will need a range of options for transport in the likely event that sufficient numbers of volunteers for Community Transport are unable to be recruited.

Discharge and Care Plans need to be comprehensive and backed up by sufficient professional staff in the local area. In particular, mental health professionals are required to support clients and their families as they proceed with their long term recovery.

Comments Highlighted

1. Social Determinants of Health - Health and community workers see the results of complex causes of poor health with clients every day. Every encounter, appointment or interaction with a client invariably provides an opportunity to assist in a positive shift related to social determinants and health outcomes.
2. Transport - We reiterate that transport opportunities must be available in sufficient numbers and delivered at convenient times and places throughout the local government area, for both clients and their carers.
3. Ageing Population - The Break O'Day area's median age is currently 50 years and the ABS social profiling indicates this will continue to increase over the next 20 years. This extraordinary demographic information should be taken into consideration when planning future services for the Break O'Day area.
4. Mental Health - Good mental health requires treatment and support that is long term, regular, consistent and positive. Long term support is integral to the recovery of people who are chronically affected by a mental health issue. Robust systems, adequate and easily accessible services need to be provided for residents in the Break O'Day area.
5. Nutrition - A dietician employed by the State Government, based in the local area, could coordinate and disseminate information on community gardens, provide nutritional advice, advise school canteens plus organise local cooking and gardening classes.
6. Health Promotion - State Government collaboration is necessary to ensure there are effective referral pathways, sufficient health promotion workers where and when they are required, plus effective information in various forms - in short, the best possible supportive environment for change.

Questions Reiterated

1. St Helens Hospital and St Marys Health Centre - Can Break O'Day residents expect an increase in the availability of services from these two venues including increased hours for allied health professionals and Community Nursing?

Can Break O'Day residents expect the number of hospital beds at each venue to remain the same as currently provided?

2. Physical Activity - Will the State Government ensure there are professional resources available within the local communities, such as exercise physiologist, physiotherapists, diabetes educators and at least one dietician?
3. Primary Care Systems - Will there be assurances that all recommendations for support and services within Care Plans will be available in the local area?
4. Health Literacy - How will the State Government ensure that any information provided for the community regarding health services will be adequately distributed, displayed and explained to the community in ways that will be unequivocally equitable and understood by persons with varying literacy skills?