



Health
Consumers
Tasmania

Building a Consumers Health **Voice in Tasmania**

Tasmanian Health Priorities *for the 2022 Federal Election*

Recommendation 1 Establish a National Health Literacy, Promotion and Prevention Agency in Tasmania.

Recommendation 2 Pilot a state-wide program to improve access to health services in regional and remote areas of Tasmania to allow the expansion of a medical primary care workforce to include community nurses, nurse practitioners and peer workers.

Recommendation 3 As a pilot program, remove the requirement for people who wish to consult a GP through telehealth to be an existing patient of that clinic across Tasmania.

Recommendation 4 Increase the MBS rebates for Tasmanians who are living in lower socio-economic geographic areas and reform the funding model for primary care in regional /remote areas.

Recommendation 5 The Commonwealth to fund the full cost of the State Program to deliver a mobile primary dental care service to prevent and treat dental caries.

Recommendation 6 Re-zone GP clinics which operate outside the Hobart, Launceston, and Kingborough local government areas from a current Level 2 rating (Modified Monash Model) to at least minimum Level 5 on the condition they bulk bill their patients and charge no out-of-pocket expenses.

Tasmanians Health Priorities for the 2022 Federal Election



i. People don't want to become ill or to have to go to hospital if they can help it

Recommendation 1 Establish a National Health Literacy, Promotion and Prevention Agency in Tasmania.

Establishing a National Health Literacy, Promotion and Prevention Agency and locating it in Tasmania will allow the Commonwealth Government to work directly with communities at risk to develop, trial and evaluate programs that can be adopted nationally supporting the implementation of the National Preventative Health Strategy (2021-2030).

Tasmania is the ideal location to establish a 'National Health Literacy, Promotion and Prevention Agency' because:

- > **Tasmania is a location of greatest need** – almost two in three people in Tasmania do not have the health literacy skills to manage their health and wellbeing, and many Tasmanians cannot access services online.
- > **Tasmania provides a significant community of interest** – to be engaged to develop, co-design, and trial the rapid rollout of health literacy and preventative measures.
- > **Tasmanian communities are telling Health Consumers Tasmania what the missing pieces to preventative health are** – and therefore can see what is needed on the ground. These include a need for greater community engagement and empowerment, increasing the level of outreach services and improving collaboration and coordination across the health sector.
- > **Tasmanians welcome Government involvement in health and wellbeing through the establishment of an Agency** - according to a recent AUSPOPS survey on population health, a majority (61.6%) of Tasmanians feel that the government has a large or very large role to play in population health, with “more than half of the respondents (55.4%) indicating that the government is yet to go far enough with regulation and policies in place to help reduce the rates of lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity.”

ii. Improve access to basic health services and support people to navigate the health system

According to UTAS – Tasmania Project, 67% of Tasmanians identified access to health care as the most important factor for Tasmania's future from across a range of economic and social factors.

Recommendation 2 Pilot a state-wide program to improve access to health services in regional and remote areas of Tasmania to allow the expansion of a medical primary care workforce to include community nurses, nurse practitioners and peer workers.

Expanding funding models to include community nurses and nurse practitioners under MBS would allow the diagnosis and treatment of a variety of chronic and acute conditions, wound management, 'hospital-in-the-home' care and palliative care, vaccinations and health promotion and preventative health measures, including a greater focus of outreach services.

The Primary Health Reform Steering Committee recommended to the Australian Government's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan that the healthcare workforce should be:

“Inclusive of all occupations in the primary health care team, fully utilising and supporting members of the team to work together to top of scope in a coordinated and safe way, with appropriate clinical governance.”

In Tasmania, this is particularly pertinent to expanding the role of nurses as it provides an existing and trained workforce that would immediately go some way to address access to primary care in regional and remote areas.

Recommendation 3 As a pilot program, remove the requirement for people who wish to consult a GP through telehealth to be an existing patient of that clinic across Tasmania.

Currently, GPs are restricted to using telehealth consultations with patients whom they have an existing clinical relationship. This creates a barrier for people to access telehealth if they are not registered with a GP practice, if their regular GP is not available (for example, due to leave), or if they are unhappy with their current GP.

This barrier is felt hardest by those in regional and remote communities who have little or no choice on where they can access primary health care.

Recommendation 4 Increase the MBS rebates for Tasmanians who are living in lower socio-economic geographic areas and reform the funding model for primary care in regional /remote areas.

In 2016, Tasmania had the highest proportion (33 per cent) of people living in the most disadvantaged areas compared to other states and territories. Increasing disadvantage is directly linked to levels of ill-health, as well as the ability to access and pay for health care services.

Tasmania has one of the most rural and remotely dispersed populations of any state or territory, and our rural and remote communities are older, sicker and poorer than the rest of Tasmanians.

Almost 50% of Tasmanians face out-of-pocket expenses when visiting a GP – the highest rate in the country outside the ACT.

Tasmanians on low income have struggled to get the primary care they need. In 2019, 45% of Tasmanians state-wide and 51% in the North-West said it was difficult to get to see the healthcare provider they needed – being able to afford to pay being a major barrier for many. HCT acknowledge that the funding arrangements for primary care is currently not sustainable for many GP's to operate in regional/remote areas, and the current funding model needs to change.

Recommendation 5 The Commonwealth to fund the full cost of the State Program to deliver a mobile primary dental care service to prevent and treat dental caries.

Co-payments are a key barrier for people on low incomes accessing primary or dental care and is one of the contributing factors to why there are over 18,000 people on the Tasmanian oral health waiting list.

Tasmania has some of the worst dental health in Australia, with the highest rate of complete tooth loss, the greatest number of dentures, the highest average number of missing teeth and the greatest number of people who have not seen a dentist in the past five years.

Rural Tasmanians experience poor oral health at significantly higher rates than people living in major centres. Across the nation there are almost three-and-a-half-times less dentists in rural and remote areas compared to the major cities.

Currently, the Commonwealth funding to the state program delivered by Oral Health Services Tasmania is capped and doesn't cater for the growing demand, thereby resulting in a co-payment required for the delivery of this service.

Recommendation 6 Re-zone GP clinics which operate outside the Hobart, Launceston, and Kingborough local government areas from a current Level 2 rating (Modified Monash Model) to at least minimum Level 5 on the condition they bulk bill their patients and charge no out-of-pocket expenses.

Evidence suggests that the type of multifaceted and bundled approach offered by the Australian Government's Incentives for Monash Model categories is effective to improve staff retention and service delivery in rural areas. However, it also shows that it needs to be targeted specifically to areas where workforce retention and service provision is most problematic.

It is recommended that for GP clinics to be re-zoned into a higher ranking area, they would be required to offer a bulk billing service to their patients.

Communities are telling [Health Consumers Tasmania](#) four things:

- i. people don't want to become ill or to have to go to hospital if they can help it
- ii. accessing basic health services is becoming more difficult for many people, particularly those in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas
- iii. navigating the health system is difficult as the system is complex and often siloed in its approach to health delivery
- iv. people want to be treated within their communities when it is safe to do so.

Tasmanians have difficulties accessing locally based health services, whether it is to see a GP or to seek an appointment with allied health or community health services. For many in the community, these services simply don't exist, and when they do, often they can't make an appointment because the providers' books are closed to new patients, they have significant waiting times or do not bulk-bill, making it too expensive. The limited availability, accessibility and affordability means for many Tasmanians; their only option is to either travel, which for many is not possible given the lack of public transport or they have mobility issues, which means they simply go without.

This has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of local communities.

As a nation emerging from the COVID pandemic, health and wellbeing is of critical concern for all Australians and this election provides a pivotal opportunity for the Federal Government to work with Tasmanians to help it lift the health profile of its people to that of those living in other mainland States.

Who is [Health Consumers Tasmania](#)

Health Consumers Tasmania seeks to improve the Tasmanian health system by building the voice of its health consumers, so they can have a say on the health services they need.

Health Consumers Tasmania is an independent not-for-profit community organisation, and we report to an independent Board, a small staff team, and a large community of supporters and followers across Tasmania encompassing patients, carers and communities.

Health Consumers Tasmania advocates for health consumers by:

- collecting community views and using this evidence to advocate for a health system that better meets the needs of Tasmanians
- facilitating consumer engagement by placing health consumer representatives on committees and workshops to inform government decision-making in service delivery design, program and systems reviews and evaluations
- providing training to health consumers on how to engage with the health system and to health staff on how to engage with individual consumers or community groups.

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ABN: 92 637 836 321