



**Health
Consumers
Tasmania**

Building a Consumers Health Voice in Tasmania

Advancing Tasmania's Health – Exposure draft response

Attn: Kathrine Morgan-Wicks,
Secretary
Department of Health

Dear Kathrine,

Health Consumers Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the *Advancing Tasmania's Health Exposure Draft*. We are happy to take questions on our feedback and we look forward to working closely with you on the next stages of Tasmanian Health Service Planning moving forward.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Levett

**Chief Executive Officer
Health Consumers Tasmania Ltd**

4th July 2022

1. Introduction

This submission from Health Consumers Tasmania is based on feedback gathered through an online discussion forum on Advancing Tasmania's Health held in June 2022, which was advertised through our networks of health consumer representatives and interested community members. It also draws upon knowledge from previous consumer engagement on the Tasmanian Health reform process (Our Healthcare Future).

2. Health Consumers Tasmania

HCT is a Company Limited by Guarantee, funded by the Tasmanian and Commonwealth governments (Department of Health and Primary Health Tasmania respectively) and reporting to an independent board. HCT has established a community of interest of over 650 people and has been formally involved in approximately 15 partnerships or national/state-wide health related committees to-date.

HCT has been formed to provide health consumer advocacy, which it does in a number of key ways:

- Facilitating consumer engagement by placing health consumers on committees and workshops to inform government decision-making in service delivery design, program and systems reviews and evaluations
- Collecting community views and using this evidence to advocate for a health system that better meets the needs of Tasmanians
- 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.

Health Consumers Tasmania is not an industry or union-based body and therefore does not represent the commercial interests of any one group or body. Rather, HCT is a facilitator for Tasmanian health consumers to express their views into the health system, and the views of the community more broadly.

3. Key points

1. Strategic Ambitions:

Overall, the feedback received on the strategic ambitions was positive. In particular, consumers are happy to see community care and disease prevention identified as priorities for health planning in Tasmania. Strengthening Telehealth and Digital Infrastructure is also welcome and this is reflected in ongoing discussions with Tasmanian health consumers.

Consumers felt very strongly that Community Care needs to be available to everyone in Tasmania and care needs to be taken to ensure services are not only based around Hobart and the hospitals. It was noted that current programs (eg. Hospital in the Home) are often limited to Tasmanian's living close to major town centres.

They also raised questions about how Community Service Organisations (CSO) and Councils will be integrated into the wider service delivery plan as they are important providers of preventative health, primary health and health promotion. Consumers want to see localised solutions to health needs (for example social prescribing), with State Government agencies supporting and working in effective partnership with CSOs and local government, ensuring that there is transparency around the strategic priorities, funding, aims and outcomes for these stakeholders.

2. Communication, Integration, and Information:

Time and time again, we hear from consumers about the difficulties in navigating through and between the many services they may need to receive their care. Many, especially those with complex illness or multimorbidity, need to access aged care or disability services, hospital and outpatient services and primary care as well as allied health services on a regular basis. All of which have different funding, governance and information sharing models. It is not surprising that this was again raised as an issue when discussing Advancing Tasmania's Health.

Consumers felt that the 'elephant in the room' is the system we have in which funding, information and communication is siloed. Consumers often have the experience of not knowing (and not being told) what services are available and what they are eligible for. This is often because service providers are not aware of the services which other organisations provide. It is frustrating and potentially unsafe when information is not shared between health service providers. In addition, the separation of different services is counterproductive to achieving holistic care which focuses on the person as a whole. Furthermore, it is unclear whose responsibility (state or federal) it is to improve health service navigation for health consumers.

Promisingly, Advancing Tasmania's Health goes some way to acknowledge and address the sharing of patient information electronically, as well as addressing gaps in health literacy. However, from a consumer perspective the coordination of care is a priority and there is a strong need for highly integrated solutions which improve service coordination at the fundamental level, rather than adding extra layers of complexity to the system to smooth out transitions in care. From the consumer perspective, the improvement of navigating health systems should be a key strategic ambition in the long-term plan for Health Service delivery in Tasmania.

3. Engaging Consumers:

Health Consumers Tasmania feels positive about continuing to build upon existing foundations in consumer engagement in the State Government Health Planning. Advancing Tasmania's Health shows that the importance of the voice of consumers has been recognised and we welcome the proposed high-level involvement of consumers in both the Tasmanian Health Senate and the Consumer Reference Group. We also recognise that consumers will need appropriate support such as reimbursement and remuneration and appropriate briefing, on which we look forward to working with you more.

4. Conclusion:

The perspective of consumers is action-oriented and outcome-focused. There was some concern that Advancing Tasmania's Health did not go far enough to outline solutions which would affect real change. Consumers are particularly interested in how access to primary care will be enhanced through state government planning and how cohesion will be achieved for people accessing mental health services in which funding is split between state and federal governments. We recognise that this is the first step in the health system planning framework and we look forward to seeing future policy which provides more detail to achieve the welcome strategic ambitions.