



**Health  
Consumers  
Tasmania**

Building a Consumers Health Voice in Tasmania

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***2021 Election Commitments – Health***

***29 March 2021***

## 1. Community Health Innovation Hubs

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Communities want to take ownership of their health and wellbeing and to have a long-term holistic focus on both the health of individuals and the health of their communities through better coordinated community health and related services. This enables communities to have a stronger voice and a say in what services they want locally and provides a pathway for communities to build bridges for their citizens to access healthcare services. It also provides an important opportunity to allow communities to take a longer-term approach to health care, strengthen their understanding of the broader social factors impacting their health and the health of their communities and identify preventative measures appropriate for their community.

An investment in working in regions; building the capacity of communities to articulate their needs and building cooperation and partnerships across the health system at a local level will go a long way in gaining community engagement and support for Health reforms that are community led.

To achieve this, Health Consumers Tasmania recommends Community Health Innovation Hubs be established in:

- Huon region
- Sorell / Tasman Peninsular
- Scottsdale
- Central Coast

Community Health Innovation Hubs would be managed by local communities (Local Health Connectors) who are resourced to bring together health consumer representatives, community advocates, clinical health services, social support services, community and sporting groups and supportive business enterprise to reduce the growing gap between the community and primary and allied health and wellbeing care. The four locations listed are based on a mix of both the socio-economic data and health profiles of the region and the degree of 'readiness' of the communities to engage, would be pilot projects over two years and each community would determine what form its 'hub' would take for their region.

This initiative delivers on the *Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council*, March 2021 recommendation #35 "The State Government and its agencies should actively seek out and fund community-led placed based recovery activities" and at the same time, allow communities and clinicians to voice their views on health service planning within their regions – consistent with *Our Health Care Futures* discussion paper.

Improving access to health care, particularly at a local and regional level is identified as the community's highest priority area for Health Consumers Tasmania of focus on.

**Election Commitment 1: Establish four Community Health Innovation Hubs as pilot projects - \$6.0 million over two years (\$750,000 per region per annum)**

## 2. Elective Surgery

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Elective surgery was identified by communities as a priority area and an issue requiring further attention. Given the following statistics:

- only 56% of Tasmanians are admitted to elective surgery within the clinically recommended time, well below the national average of 90%<sup>1</sup>
- the number of people waiting for elective surgery has grown 7.9% in the past year, to 12,086<sup>2</sup>, and compared to April 2018 (7,634 patients) represents a doubling (58%) in the number on elective surgeries waiting lists.
- A total of 7,388 patients (December 2020) did not receive surgery within the clinically recommended time: 315 Cat 1 patients; 2,560 Cat 2 patients; and 4,513 Cat 3 patients.

The overriding objective of elective surgery is that all Tasmanians receive elective surgery within the clinically recommended time.

Whilst HCT welcomes the Government's recent announcement that \$45.5 million has been allocated to increase surgical capacity for elective surgery, HCT requests that the 'structural features' of the Tasmanian Health Service be addressed to reduce the waiting lists. A report by the Tasmanian Health Department highlighted that funding alone will not address structural impediments to elective surgery.

"Additional funding/capacity alone is unlikely to address the issues Tasmania has with long waiting patients. Systemic change is required to improve long term efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. Such change will need to involve the reform of how patients get placed on the waiting list, how they are categorised, how they are 'treated in turn', and how their cancellations are managed".<sup>3</sup>

In its Public Hospital Report Card 2020<sup>4</sup>, the AMA notes that delaying treatment significantly increases the risk of patient complications and poorer outcomes. Not only does this result in longer hospital stays when the surgery is eventually performed; it also results in increased costs and additional pressure on other health services as patients wait for surgery.

**Election Commitment 2: A combined clinical and consumer oversight body be established to work with Government to improve hospital performance with the objective that all patients receive elective surgery within the clinically recommended time.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/myhospitals/sectors/elective-surgery>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthstats.dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthsystem>

<sup>3</sup> [www.onehealthsystem.tas.gov.au](http://www.onehealthsystem.tas.gov.au) – White Paper, *Supplement No. 5 Elective Surgery*

<sup>4</sup> <https://ama.com.au/articles/ama-public-hospital-report-card-2020>

### 3. Fund Health Consumers Tasmania

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The Health Minister, the Department and health service providers across Tasmania all want to know what the community need from their health system.

Health Consumers Tasmania is receiving more and more requests from our funders for this information, which is a good thing. This information is a necessary and critical ingredient if the health system is to become more targeted in its service delivery, better meet community needs, modernise and improve its systems, increase collaboration and reduces waste. In doing so, this will reduce the overall health component of the State Budget.

This information, combined with engaged and supportive communities, are the missing foundations required to build on the health reforms already underway across Tasmania. Funding Health Consumers Tasmania will help deliver the desired outcomes from the *Our Healthcare Futures* discussion paper, “planning for the future – strengthen the clinical and consumer voice in health service planning”.

Health Consumers Tasmania is appreciative of the strong support provided by Government to date and the seed funding provided to establish Health Consumers Tasmania over its formative years. The organisation now has the structures in place to build this work but will require resources over and above the seed funding that it originally received.

**Election Commitment 3: Fund Health Consumers Tasmania \$3 million over 4 year to provide the Government of the day and service providers with unfiltered, succinct, and clear advice built on the conversations and analysis of community needs to allow informed policy decision-making.**

### 4. Health Complaints Process

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*The Australian Charter of HealthCare Rights*, which was endorsed by each State Health Minister through COAG, provides a legislative framework for informed consumer input into the health system, particularly in consumer-centred care. A key plank of the Charter is the ability of health consumers to be able to provide feedback, positive and negative, to service providers.

The Tasmanian Ombudsman, also the Health Complaints Commissioner under the Health Complaints Act 1995, receives, resolves and reports on complaints relating to the provision of health service by a health service provider in both the public and the private sector and performs the critical role in promoting and protecting health rights of Tasmanians.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee - *Ombudsman and Health Complaints – 2020 Report* highlights “the Ombudsman is not adequately resourced to enable best practice in public administration, decision-making and promoting good governance more generally to ensure public confidence”. The report findings highlight that given the number of complaints received by the Health Complaints Commissioner has doubled over the past ten years, the Health Complaints Commissioner is now unable to manage the volume of complaints received

resulting in an increase in the number of complaints carried forward each year and therefore cannot meet the legislative obligations of the Health Complaints Act 1995.

It is also important to note that limited feedback is received from the North West Coast of Tasmania, therefore it is important that the Office has a presence in the North of the State.

The Office also does not have a health consumer advisory body that can work with the office to ensure it is a consumer led organisation.

**Election Commitment 4: Ensure adequate staffing of the Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner (minimum 4 FTE staff including 2x Band 6 (Senior Investigation Officer and Conciliation Officer) and 2 Band 5 (Complaint Resolution Officer and Public Education Officer – based in the North of Tasmania).**

**Election Commitment 5: The Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner works with Health Consumers Tasmania to establish a Consumer Advisory Body for the Office.**

## **5. Implement a Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers in Tasmania**

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While health complaints against registered health practitioners are governed at a national level by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, in Tasmania there is still no legislative basis for health consumers to satisfactorily resolve their complaints about unregistered health practitioners. This covers, for example, aged care workers, dietitians, audiologists, social workers, speech therapists, psychotherapists and counsellors, in addition to many complementary and alternative health care practitioners.

What is required in Tasmania is the adoption and enforcement of a legally binding National Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers. This Code of Conduct was agreed by COAG in 2015, with the intention that all jurisdictions would implement and progress the code. Although legislation to implement the Code has been passed by the Tasmanian parliament, it has still not been proclaimed. Having a clear, equitable and effective complaints system form an essential part of a feedback loop which helps to ensure Tasmanians are receiving care that is, at a minimum, safe and have mechanisms to provide feedback into their health care systems.

**Election Commitment 6: The Tasmanian Government to formally adopt and proclaim the Code of Conduct for health care workers across Tasmania.**

## Who is Health Consumers Tasmania

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Health Consumers Tasmania is a Company Limited by Guarantee, funded by the Tasmanian Department of Health and Primary Health Tasmania and reports to an independent board. Health Consumers Tasmania 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.

Health Consumers Tasmania has been established to provide health consumer advocacy through

- 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 consumers 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.

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, Health Consumers Tasmania is a facilitator for Tasmanian health consumers to express their views into the health system, and the views of the community more broadly.

A copy of the organisations strategic plan, annual report and an internal evaluation of its performance is available on our website: <https://healthconsumerstas.org.au>