

**One State, One Health System, Better Outcomes:  
Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services –  
Rebuilding Tasmania’s Health System**

**Hobart Women’s Health Centre  
Submission**

February 20, 2015



Hobart Women’s Health Centre

## **About Hobart Women's Health Centre**

Hobart Women's Health Centre is a universal service available to all women in Tasmania. It seeks to increase the range of services and reach to women who are vulnerable to inequitable health outcomes due to social or economic determinants. The Centre acknowledges the impact of societal influences such as income, education, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability and isolation on health outcomes and seeks to reduce the negative effects of these factors on individual women.

The Centre is part of a national network of women's health centres. It is a health promotion charity funded by the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services, guided by the World Health Organisation's definition of health; 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.

The Centre provides a safe, supportive environment for women. It is run by women, for women, and aims to promote positive health outcomes by providing a diverse range of services that take a holistic approach. This approach to women's health has seen the Centre at the forefront of preventative health care in Tasmania.

The vision of the Centre is for Tasmanian women to be informed, supported and active decision makers in their own health and wellbeing. As a result, the Centre has also been a key advocate on issues such as a woman's right to make informed choices about her own body, migrant and refugee women's health, eating disorders, and the arts and health. The Centre consistently advocates on behalf of women with both State and Commonwealth governments on a range of legislation and policies impacting on women's health.

In recent years the Centre has broadened its service delivery component by undertaking outreach activities, offering a state-wide information telephone line and using electronic technologies. It currently provides services to women from 48 different postcode areas.

Hobart Women's Health Centre continues to provide direct services to individual women and to advocate for, and promote, the health and wellbeing of all Tasmanian women. Our knowledge and expertise is based on 26 years' experience working with, and for, the women of this state.

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Hobart Women's Health Centre welcomes the *One State, One Health System, Better Outcomes: Delivering Safe and Sustainable Clinical Services – Rebuilding Tasmania's Health System* reform paper and consultation process. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment and would like to note our involvement in both the TasCOSS submission in response to this reform paper and their recent Budget Priorities statement. We would like to endorse, in broad terms, the direction and priorities outlined in the TasCOSS submission particularly its emphasis on early intervention and preventative health, its concerns for the most vulnerable in our communities and the social determinants of health and the practical concerns about the need to find sustainable solutions to high quality, equitable service delivery.

The Centre also acknowledges the submission made by the Social Determinants of Health Advocacy Network and supports their appeal for action on the social determinants of health to help achieve the Government's vision for Tasmania.

As a community based, gender specific, health prevention charity, Hobart Women's Health Centre is pleased the One State reform paper acknowledges the important role services such as ours play in the delivery of healthcare. However, the Centre is concerned the focus of this reform paper on the clinical, acute sector fails to appropriately address the part prevention, early intervention and social factors play in shaping the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

The Centre's view is investing in prevention, early intervention, improved health literacy and ongoing support for the community, especially the most vulnerable, will result not only in improved health but also a reduced burden on acute services and resources.

At the Centre we provide health prevention and promotion activities to women. One such activity is our Ageing Well with Weights, program which is a classic example of the benefits of investing resources in prevention.

#### Comments from Ageing Well with Weights participants

*I do most of my weights exercises in a balance pose. The result of this balance training has been that I find that when I almost trip, I am able to right myself without falling. I consider this extremely important at my age especially with frail bones. A broken bone that stopped me getting into the bush would be devastating for my mental, spiritual and emotional health.*

*I am osteopenic and osteoporotic . . . but improving! Between the last two bone density tests my spine increased in density by an amazing 9 per cent (my hips a little less but good improvement too).*

As the TasCOSS submission pointed out, the community sector plays an invaluable role in improving and maintaining Tasmanians' health. Many organisations are already struggling with the demand for their services and limited funding options. If there is a shift toward more community care, the sector must be adequately resourced.

Investing resources into the community sector and programs which support patients after surgery and/or hospital treatment, for example, can have a significant impact on their health and wellbeing. One such program auspiced by the Centre is the Encore program for women who have undergone breast cancer treatment.

*"I am impressed with this program the venue and the facilitators. The program helped put the pieces back together after the experience of the Breast cancer operation with the resultant changes. Spending time with other similarly affected women also helped a lot."*  
*Southern Encore participant*

Social interaction is also a well evidenced contributor to wellbeing and the older age group attending the Hobart Women's Health Centre who often comment, that the activity they attend is the highlight of their week.

*"Apart from the physical benefits, the friendships made in this group have become important to us and we have gained great emotional support by sharing our lives with each other. In fact, this outcome has become even more important than the original one of keeping ourselves strong physically and we consider ourselves doubly lucky."*

*In summary, the HWHC provides opportunities for women of all ages to improve their health, take up new interests and meet women with similar concerns and needs. In a society where women of any age can easily become socially isolated, the Centre and its activities provide a welcome (and often very necessary) antidote."*

The safe non-clinical environment has been a great attraction to isolated women, especially women with mental health issues or those who experienced the trauma of surgery and would like support away from the hospital environment, such as those who attend the Breast Cancer support groups, even though they have been very grateful for the fine care they have received in hospital.

When considering the use of facilities as part of this reform, consideration needs to be given to the need for gender separated accommodation and support for women living with a mental illness. In particular, women who have experienced violence and/or sexual assault perpetrated by men.

We appreciate the recognition, in the reform paper, resources will be required to address barriers to access as a result of changes outlined in the Role Delineation Framework. And while the Centre applauds the goal of access to better care for Tasmanians, it must not come at the expense of easy access to care. In order to ensure equity of access substantial improvements to current transportation services and low cost accommodation for patients and carers are required. The Centre already has contact with women (residing in both the Hobart metropolitan area and in country towns) who find it difficult to access affordable transport and/or assistance when needing to undergo day surgery.

Information regarding transport and accommodation options need to be presented to patients and carers. In times of stress the additional burden, of discovering such options, should not be on the individuals involved. The application process for assistance also ought to be simple and supported.

As quoted in the Social Determinants of Health Network submission above all poverty is the greatest threat to health.<sup>1</sup> People living in poverty struggle to afford, adequate shelter and food, let alone, to participate in health prevention activities such as exercise classes or benefit from complimentary health practices such as massage. At the Centre we provide exercise classes either free or at very low cost. Complimentary health practitioners are also available for women to access at a cheaper price than elsewhere. This model of providing these low cost services for people on low incomes could be duplicated elsewhere in the state by adequately resourcing other community sector organisations.

Either not being able to afford or to get timely access to a GP or health service would impact on the number of patients attending the emergency departments of the state's hospitals. Many women who contact the Centre are finding it very difficult to find either a new GP who bulk bills and/or a female GP. The Centre is also contacted by women who have been told by their normal GP pap smears are not something they wish to do.

Initially, as a solution to the lack of female GPs and the need for a specialist in women's health and Pap smear testing an independent Nurse Practitioner commenced working from the Centre in 2011. The service provided by the Nurse Practitioner has proved to be very popular and effective. Women are able to see the Nurse Practitioner for up to 30 minutes with the appointment and any pathology bulk billed. This provides all women, regardless of income, with ample opportunity to discuss all their health concerns and to participate in one of the most effective health prevention screening programs ever introduced. The Nurse Practitioner at the Centre has picked up on a number of life threatening conditions just because of her specialism, skill and the time she can offer patients.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO, 1997, Jakarta Declaration on Leading Health Promotion into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The lack of GPs particularly female GPs in rural areas suggests duplicating the Nurse Practitioner model used at the Centre (for all genders) across the state particularly in rural areas would provide an additional primary health care option. In order to attract and retain Nurse Practitioners it is in the Tasmanian government's best interest to encourage changes to Medicare to make the rebate for Nurse Practitioners into a living wage. For more information we have attached to this submission an *Evaluation of The Nurse Practitioner Role At the Hobart Women's Health Centre*.

As mentioned earlier the Centre is run by women for women and consultation is a vital in ensuring the services we provide them meet their needs. As mentioned by TasCOSS, in their submission, the Centre also highly recommends consumer consultation and representation be incorporated into both the reform process and the final healthcare model. By involving consumers and raising the awareness of the benefits of reform the Tasmanian population is much more likely to embrace the changes to their health system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this reform process. The Centre is happy to discuss further any of the points raised in this submission and looks forward to ongoing participation in the reform process.