

Dr Aaron Hawkins

Our Healthcare Future Team
Department of Health
Tasmania

Wednesday 22nd June, 2022

To whom it may concern,

My name is Aaron Hawkins, I am a rural generalist working as a general practitioner at Deloraine Medical Centre and Rural Medical Practitioner at Deloraine District Hospital. Please find below some of my thoughts and feedback regarding Our Healthcare Future. I have special interest in mental health, so many of my comments below are focused in that area.

It will come as no surprise to anyone reading this that one of the key issues I see in my community is timely access to general practitioner. For ordinary appointments there is up to four-week wait in many regions, and reserved urgent "on the day" appointments are often filled within minutes of opening on the day. This is of course overflowing into the emergency departments and often detrimental to the long term management of chronic illness for patients (in particular the less health literate and disadvantaged, who are less likely to have advance planning for medical care). I am supportive of any attempts to increase access to general practitioners in the community. Some thoughts I have regarding this include

- Public THS employment model for general practitioners (similar to the Queensland model using a 19(2) exemption) may be beneficial in attracting GPs and providing job/income security.
- Incentives for GPs to move out of the major cities (Hobart and Launceston) and support for training and supervision in these regional practices.

Mental health in particular is incredibly difficult to access quality care in Tasmania. Firstly, as above, accessing a GP in Tasmania is already difficult. The public mental health system (in which I worked as a psychiatric registrar in 2020) is completely saturated and there is no capacity for increasing patient load. As a result of this, massive portions of the community are unable to access any public mental health care at all (this is commonly including anxiety, depression, personality disorder, adult eating disorders and substance use disorder). The private psychiatric system in Tasmania is potentially in an even worse state, with massive waiting lists or closed books for in person psychiatric reviews, often with massive private fees making access impossible for many Tasmanians.

Some thoughts I have regarding this:

- Similar to the above thoughts on general practice, a potential solution would be publicly employed GPs or rural generalists with special interest in mental health forming an outreach or extended arm of the public mental health service. This may bridge the gap between the primary care and specialist mental health care. This could be partially funded with a 19(2) exemption model of care where GPs are billing Medicare for patient reviews. Other advantages here would be that these GPs would be freed to spend more time with each patient, hopefully resulting in more meaningful and positive outcomes for the community.

I am happy to discuss these comments further over the phone or expand on them in writing. Please feel free to contact me via phone or email.

Kind regards,

Dr Aaron Hawkins
MBBS, GCertPsychMed, FACRRM (Psych)