

4 July 2022

The Honourable Jeremy Rockliff
Premier and Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing
Level 10, 15 Murray Street
HOBART, TAS 7000

Dear Premier

National Seniors Australia – the leading advocacy organisation for older Australians, together with our Tasmanian Policy Advisory Group (made up of members who represent our diverse membership across Tasmania) appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* report released 6 June 2022.

We support the Tasmanian Government's six ambitions to guide the future direction of the Tasmanian health system and are pleased to see the challenge of an ageing population and the increasing need for improved access to hospital and health services acknowledged.

National Seniors Australia envisions a system that is not only 'strong and sustainable' but one that Tasmania's older population can rely on – regardless of their medical need or geographical location.

To help achieve this, National Senior Australia recommends the following:

Improve emergency department waiting times to meet national targets set for emergency departments

Prior to COVID-19, the Tasmanian hospital system was under increasing stress as it struggled to cope with an ageing population and increasing incidents of chronic disease. Emergency Departments received some respite as patients stopped presenting but as restrictions lifted, the former problems of overcrowding of Tasmanian emergency departments have returned.

According to data from The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Tasmanian emergency departments do not meet national benchmarks for waiting times. National Seniors would like to see waiting times improved to meet the national targets. This would mean moving from 65% of patients being treated 'on time' to the national benchmark of 76% of patients being treated 'on time.'

Improve access to health services

National Seniors Australia welcomes the Tasmanian Government's investments to improve access to health services including the Rural Medical Generalist Program, the Rural Medical Workforce Centre at Latrobe and the after-Hours GP support initiative (beginning in Burnie, Launceston, Hobart, Sorell, Deloraine, King Island, and the Tasman Peninsula).

However, Tasmania's rural and isolated regions can present significant challenges when accessing health services, especially in cases of emergency when planning is not possible. National Seniors Australia would like to see these regions (where older Tasmanian's often forgo timely and necessary medical support) considered when deciding future locations where GPs and pharmacies will extend their operating hours on evenings and weekends.

Commit to meeting the national targets for dental waiting times.

Oral health is central to the wellbeing and quality of life of older Tasmanians, who generally experience a decline in oral health as they age. A healthy mouth is important for eating, communicating and to ward off infections. Evidence suggest poor oral health is a contributor to diseases and conditions such endocarditis and cardiovascular disease.

According to The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the average number of cavities for older Tasmanian's is above the national average and is the worst in Australia. Tasmania also has the highest rate of total tooth loss - 10 per cent compared with the NT at 2.4 per cent.

Furthermore, waiting times for treatment in the public system works against oral health for seniors. Waiting lists appear to have escalated and approximately 10,000 people are on current waiting lists.

Given the government recognises early prevention can improve quality of life while reducing or eliminating the need for later more costly care, National Seniors Australia requests the oral health of older Tasmanian's be given a greater priority.

We thank you for again for the opportunity to provide feedback on *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* report and trust these recommendations are helpful in the next steps of designing the blueprint for the future of healthcare in Tasmania.

To discuss any of the recommendations please contact Tasmanian Policy Advisory Group Chair Mary Parsissons at mparsiss@bigpond.net.au.

Yours sincerely



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