

Department of Health

Response to

Tasmanian Health Senate Meeting Report 25 August 2023

Message from the Secretary

On behalf of the Health Executive, Department of Health (DoH) I am pleased to provide a formal response to the Tasmanian Health Senate Meeting Report of 25 August 2023.

Firstly, I would like to reflect on the opportunity I had to address Senate members on the day.

I presented an overview of the Department's Response to the inaugural Tasmanian Health Senate Meeting Report of 15 May 2023. I was pleased to advise members that the Health Executive accepted all the recommendations in the Report.

It was a chance to give Senate members an insight into how their advice and recommendations helped to shape the final version of the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040*. The advice of the Senate, along with feedback received during the public consultation period for the exposure draft of the Plan, shaped the final version of the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040*, released by the Premier in June 2023.

From here the Tasmanian Health Senate will be kept informed on the implementation of the Health Senate recommendations through formal advice to the Senate and through the Department's reporting on the implementation of the Long-Term Plan.

On 25 August 2023 the Tasmanian Health Senate met to consider virtual healthcare in Tasmania.

This is a particularly relevant topic with the Tasmanian Government recently investing \$41 million over two years to enhance virtual care delivery in Tasmania. With virtual care technologies, such as telehealth, remote monitoring, and enhanced communication tools, a range of safe treatment options can be delivered in our communities, providing more integrated and convenient healthcare for more Tasmanians.

Following the Steering Committee's considerations of the recommendations and endorsement by Senate members, Co-Chairs, Clinical Associate Professor Marcus Skinner and Associate Professor Viet Tran presented the Senate's deliberations and recommendations to me and then to the Department's Health Executive.

The Health Executive has reviewed the recommendations presented in the Tasmanian Health Senate Meeting Report of 25 August 2023 and provides its considerations in this response.

I congratulate the members of the Tasmanian Health Senate and its Steering Committee and thank them for their collective independent advice on healthcare planning and delivery. I commend the Senate for the ongoing respect the diversity of members to utilise their broad knowledge, expertise and experience to foster a culture of opportunity and innovation.

On behalf of the Health Executive, I would like to thank all Senate members for their contributions and commitment to improve Tasmania's health system.

Kathrine Morgan-Wicks

Secretary, Department of Health

Response to Recommendations

The Tasmanian Health Senate considered virtual healthcare in Tasmania and presented five recommendations.

The Health Executive has considered these recommendations in the context of key planning activities, including the development of a virtual care strategy for Tasmania. The Health Executive acknowledges the Tasmanian Health Senate's advice on virtual care and will ensure the Virtual Care Program within the Department of Health is aware of the feedback.

The Department of Health has established the Virtual Care Program to improve services for Tasmanians by providing home-based and virtual patient-centred care and to reduce the burden on acute health services.

Under the theme of 'Right Care, Right Place, Right Time', the expansion of Virtual Care Service aligns with the reform initiatives within *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* to provide services closer to communities and in people's preferred place of care, their home, when appropriate.

The Tasmanian Virtual Care Program will develop a Tasmanian Virtual Care Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Further information on the Health Executive formal response to the Health Senate's recommendations is below.

Recommendation 1 – Accepted

Establish Virtual Care Hubs where people can access technology, receive technology assistance and be supported by on-site health professionals.

Part of the development of the Tasmanian Virtual Care Strategy will be to deliver more care in the community through establishing dedicated multidisciplinary Central Virtual Care Hub/s, including a single point of access for health information, referral and navigation for home and community-based care. It will also investigate and implement opportunities for technology assisted access to specialised healthcare in Tasmanian via Telehealth enabled Models of Care.

The Tasmanian Government has allocated \$500 000 to deliver the District Hospitals and Community Health Centres Masterplan in line with the place-based approach to rural health service planning outlined in the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040*. This Masterplan will guide the Government's capital investment into our 13 rural and regional hospitals and 23 community health centres in line with the community needs.

Health services planning will look to reduce service duplication, strengthen collaboration and ensure the greatest service efficiencies for communities in Tasmania.

The Digital Health Foundations program encompasses a comprehensive initiative to enhance the technological infrastructure across our 13 rural and regional hospitals and 23 community health centres. The scheduled completion for the upgrade of all wired network infrastructure at these facilities is set for mid-2024. Simultaneously, the deployment and commissioning of hospital-grade

Wi-Fi have commenced, with a targeted completion date by the conclusion of the 2024-2025 financial year. Concurrently, an assessment of network connectivity from each site to the core Department of Health network will be conducted for capacity and resilience. If deemed necessary during the installation of Wi-Fi at each site, network links will be upgraded to ensure compliance with specified requirements.

This recommendation will be monitored and reported to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

Recommendation 2 – Accepted

To ensure that virtual care is integrated across the health system in primary, community, emergency, acute and sub-acute care.

The development of the Tasmanian Virtual Care Strategy will focus on enhancing and integrating community and home-based services through strengthening and better coordination of the delivery of home and community-based services across a range of care areas and increased virtual care bed capacity. It is expected that the Virtual Care Strategy will be circulated for stakeholder feedback by the end of 2023.

Through implementation of the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare In Tasmania 2040*, and positive outcomes in providing consistent, high quality and sustainable care, the Hospital In the Home (HiTH) services will expand in the South through the Hospital@home initiative, with the inclusion of a Geriatric Evaluation Management Model of Care. The service provides hospital equivalent care to people who can be cared for at home.

Using digital technology to expand telehealth and virtual care, together with dedicated trained staff who are equipped to provide care in the home or community, will support the enhancement of care@home services in Tasmania.

The Rapid Access Inreach Service (RAIS) will also be expanded from its trial in the North and be implemented in the North West. RAIS is an *Our Healthcare Future* initiative. RAIS provides advice to General Practice and Rural Medical Practitioners in the community and district hospitals to support patients at risk of deterioration to prevent unnecessary emergency department presentations, a patient centred model of care and improve patient health outcomes. The service covers a large geographical area and optimises virtual care telehealth opportunities to support and complement in-person, face to face consults.

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The Department of Health has also expanded the current Victorian Stroke Telemedicine (VST) service to the Mersey Community Hospital to enable access to 24/7 on-call support from stroke specialists at the VST to optimise the care provided to patients who present with stroke symptoms. This expansion follows the roll out of the service to the North West Regional Hospital and

Launceston General Hospital. Implementation of this service has been successful in optimising the delivery of stroke care to patients. It is also part of the Department's *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040* and reflects the commitment to providing greater specialised services in Tasmania and utilising virtual care to deliver services closer to where people live.

Services Frameworks are also being developed to guide the future direction of Intermediate Care, and After Hours Primary and Urgent Care, in Tasmania. These services frameworks will clearly define, map and integrate service delivery across the health system, including through the utilisation of virtual models of care.

Consultation through regional workshops across the state is underway to focus on opportunities to strengthen and better coordinate intermediate services delivered in the home and in communities, including the role of virtual care.

This will enable the development of an Intermediate Care Services Framework a key reform to provide better and more appropriate care for patients and reduce pressure on hospitals through integrating care, including virtual care.

This recommendation will be monitored and reported to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

Recommendation 3 – Accepted

Breakdown funding siloes across state and commonwealth to offer virtual healthcare through a co-funded model to promote consistent delivery across the health system.

The progression and acceptance by community of virtual care during COVID-19 is an incredible opportunity which should be grasped going forward, beyond simplistic telehealth MBS support. States should be supported by the Commonwealth to digitally reform their health systems, offering integrated health information and a joined up primary care, diagnostic to acute care journey for patients. Siloed funding can result in a lack of coordination across different care systems, which makes patient-centric models difficult to support. Breaking down funding siloes can provide greater flexibility and incentivise and support innovative models of care that span across different care settings, including virtual care.

Tasmania is actively engaging with the Mid Term Review of the Addendum to the National Health Reform Agreement 2020-25. Through this process there is the opportunity to better support virtual care models, including through flexible funding arrangements.

Tasmania is also a signatory of the recently published *Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health 2023-2027* which facilitates a national funded pathway to enable interoperability and connected data across Australia's health care settings.

This includes foundational, national and strategic priority projects funded by the agreement in pursuit of efficiency and sustainability of the health care system. This incorporates virtual care enablers such as electronic prescribing, adoption of national terminology standards and increasing the focus on healthcare identifiers and the national health service directory.

This recommendation will be monitored and reported to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

Recommendation 4 – Accepted

That virtual care is accessible to all consumers and through one platform or ‘front door’, so people are directed to where they need to go.

Expanding virtual care is a key focus of the

Long-Term Plan for Healthcare 2040. Specifically, *Action 2.2.1 – Establishing central virtual care navigation hubs to support directing patients to the right care setting to meet their needs* looking to strengthen and better coordinate the delivery of home and community-based services across a range of care areas. This includes intermediate care, subacute care and Hospital@home.

Through a single point of access for home and community-based care, it is envisaged that it will be easier for both consumers and DoH services to identify what care pathways are available to be safely delivered in the home. The virtual care navigation hub concept will rely on interdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation to realise a centralised point of entry to out-of-hospital care and care at home, alongside core, interoperable digital solutions. A hub could include service delivery through navigation, assessment / consultation and coordination of care through investigation, triage, physical therapies, mental health support, pharmacy and discharge support.

The Department will aim to bring home-based virtual care services together with consideration for interoperability, sustainability, and scalability. Focusing on integration of both clinical and digital solutions across streams, rather than each service operating independently, with its own referral pathway, models of care, technologies, and independent workforce.

Virtual care will allow existing services such as Community Rapid Response Service (ComRRS) Community Nursing, RAIS and Hospital@home to be better connected and integrated under the umbrella of a central virtual care navigation hub. The central virtual care navigation hubs will strengthen and better coordinate the delivery of home and community-based services across a range of care areas, including intermediate care, subacute care and Hospital@home.

This recommendation will be monitored and reported to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

Recommendation 5 – Accepted

Promote the benefit of a digital health platform that enables timely access and secure sharing of current and correct patient information with health professionals.

The Department of Health is committed to significant digital health reforms. Tasmania’s *Digital Health Transformation Program – Improving Patient Outcomes 2022-32* includes activities to improve electronic medical records and integration, and supportive actions including expedited implementation of nationally consistent, real-time health information sharing.

This has benefits both for patients and for the health system, including supporting faster and more accurate diagnoses and treatment decisions, and reducing duplication of tests and procedures, leading to cost savings for both patients and the healthcare system. Tasmania has also committed to national work in support of this, including the *Connecting Australian Healthcare — National Healthcare Interoperability Plan 2023-28*.

As the first step in establishing a statewide fully integrated care platform, a Request for Proposal was issued in February 2023, seeking an Electronic Medical Record including Electronic Medication Management capability, and an Ambulance electronic Patient Care Record.

Based on the responses to this process, a decision was made to progress with separate Request for Tenders to procure the Electronic Medical Record and Ambulance electronic Patient Care Record capabilities.

The Request for Tenders were released in October 2023 for both Electronic Medical Record and Ambulance electronic Patient Care Record and it is anticipated successful tenderer/s contract will be made by the end of 2024.

The eReferrals system has been successfully implemented at all four major hospitals, providing General Practitioners with a more connected and secure platform to refer patients to outpatient services. To date over 100 000 referrals have been managed through this system, including more than 30 000 smart electronic referrals.

A Digital Outpatient Management and Virtual Care system will be implemented throughout 2024. This 'Digital Front Door' will:

- Reduce reliance on clinic facilities through uptake of telehealth services.
- Provide appointment visibility through an online Patient Portal.
- Provide greater access and equity of care for patients to services.

A Clinical Viewer prototype will be implemented throughout 2024 with implementation expected to be completed by mid-25. The initial focus of the prototype is expected to be on General Practitioners, with the possibility of extending its scope to include Ambulance Tasmania staff in the future. A working group will be established with Suitable General Practitioner representation.

Significant investments are also continuing in Cybersecurity, Digital Health Infrastructure, and Clinical System Upgrades and Adoption projects in anticipation of digital transformation.

This recommendation will continue to be monitored and reported to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

Monitoring and Review

In line with the Tasmanian Health Senate Operational Framework, the Tasmanian Health Senate Meeting Report and the Department of Health Response will be publicly available on the DoH website.

A Departmental representative may attend a Tasmanian Health Senate meeting and respond to the Report. The representative may note which recommendations have been accepted, accepted in principle or not accepted with rationale explained to members.

The acceptance and implementation of recommendations will be monitored by the Department and reported back to the Tasmanian Health Senate.

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