

Rapid Access to Specialists in the Community – North and North West

Immediate Action: Develop and implement a service that provides GPs and other primary care health professionals with rapid access to staff specialists in the North and North West to provide care to people with chronic and complex healthcare needs, particularly during early acute exacerbations of chronic conditions.

Linked Initiative: *Launceston General Hospital Masterplan, Health Workforce 2040*

What is the Rapid Access to Specialists in the Community – North and North West service?

Many Tasmanians with chronic conditions and complex health needs could be treated in the community rather than going to hospital.

We are establishing the Rapid Access to Specialists in the Community service to help people living with multiple chronic conditions to access specialist care sooner, closer to home.

This specialist inreach service will provide GPs and other primary healthcare professionals with rapid access to medical specialists in the North and North West, to support them to manage people with chronic and complex healthcare needs.

General medical specialists will provide the service at primary and secondary healthcare sites, such as GP practices, Residential Aged Care Facilities, District Hospitals and Community Health Centres.

This will occur at the request of GPs and other primary care providers.

GPs and other community-based health professionals provide the majority of care to people with chronic conditions such as asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal conditions and stroke.

Caring for people with chronic and complex healthcare needs can require:

- a higher or more specialised level of care
- the support of several healthcare professionals, including medical specialists
- care for multiple conditions associated with the person's illness.

This type of care is not always available in the community and GPs and primary care providers are not able to easily access specialist advice to support people with chronic conditions. As a result, these patients can spend lengthy or repeated periods in emergency departments or hospital inpatient beds.

GPs and other primary care providers will be able to access specialist support in the community, so patients with chronic conditions who need specialist care can get it closer to home, instead of needing to present to emergency departments.

How will the new service benefit Tasmanians?

Healthcare in the community is better for people and better for health systems – right care, in the right place, at the right time.

The service will benefit Tasmanians by providing people with chronic and complex healthcare needs with the help they need to manage their health and wellbeing. It will also reduce demand on our emergency departments.

Specialist support in general practice and community settings can provide:

- access to specialist care, sooner and closer to home
- a stronger focus on patients' multidisciplinary health needs
- equal or better health outcomes as people spend less time in hospital
- healthcare at a lower cost to the health system
- fewer avoidable hospital stays
- reduced demand on the major hospitals in the North and North West.

People living in North and North West Tasmania with chronic and complex health needs are more likely to experience an avoidable hospital stay than people in other parts of Australia. The Rapid Access to Specialists in the Community service is being established to address this.

How will Joe benefit?

Joe is 76 years old and has been struggling to manage his health.

Around seven years ago he was diagnosed with cardiovascular disease and diabetes after a major health scare. More recently, he has developed arthritis.

Joe's GP has been supporting him to manage his health needs. He is on multiple medications, which can be hard to keep a track of. Joe also juggles multiple appointments with different specialists.

In the last 12 months, Joe has sought care from the emergency department five times because his condition has deteriorated, and he needed specialist care. Joe could have stayed in his home with specialist care.

Joe's GP seeks advice from the specialist General Physician who is a part of the team running services out of his general practice.

The General Physician reviews Joe's medical history and requests a frailty assessment to see if he needs more support to manage at home alone with arthritis.

The General Physician adjusts two of Joe's medications and refers him to an occupational therapist who will visit him at home to review what aids and equipment are needed.

The General Physician works with Joe and his GP to update his personalised care plan to reflect his current health needs, which include lifestyle strategies to manage his multiple chronic conditions.

Joe books a follow-up appointment with his GP to review his progress in a month.



What will happen next?

We will work with key stakeholders including specialists, GPs, primary care providers and consumers to establish the service, including:

- finalisation of the service model
- recruitment of staff
- integration with existing health services
- development of supporting materials (eg. patient management plans, patient referral forms, promotional materials, policies and procedures).

The Rapid Access to Specialists in the Community service will consider the range of existing services available to ensure it can successfully operate the service within an integrated health system.

An evaluation will determine the success of the service, and whether it needs to be refined and potentially expanded in its scope and/or to other parts of Tasmania.

For more information email ourhealthcarefuture@health.tas.gov.au and check www.health.tas.gov.au/ourhealthcarefuture for updates.