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# Community Report on the Blue Mountains Community Forums on Health **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

(incorporating the results of the  
online Blue Mountains Health Community Survey)

held Thursday 30 August 2012

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Conducted by the  
Interim Joint Health Consumer Committee  
of the Nepean-Blue Mountains Medicare Local  
and the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District



Health  
Nepean Blue Mountains  
Local Health District



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blue Mountains Community Forums on Health were part of a series of forums organised by the Interim Joint Consumer Committee of the **Nepean-Blue Mountains Medicare Local (the Medicare Local)** and the **Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (the Local Health District)**.

The Blue Mountains forums were held on Thursday 30 August 2012 and attended by 100 people. The forums were supplemented by an online survey for residents of the Blue Mountains Local Government Area (LGA) to have their say on health services in the region, to which 38 people responded.

Forum and survey participants provided a number of positive stories and comments about health services. In particular, participants were clear about praising doctors, nursing staff and other health professionals, administrative and community transport staff, community services and hospital care. They recognised that there were severe resource shortages both in the hospital and the community; however the members of staff were doing their best.

A wide range of concerns was aired. Some were specific to the Blue Mountains while others were shared by participants at the Community Forums on Health held in other LGAs. The main problems identified include:

- **Transport** access and cost and the related issue of parking. The geography of the Blue Mountains and the location of health services create many access problems which are compounded by the limited availability and high cost of transport, limited suitable public transport and set down areas, and lack of affordable and convenient parking. Transport is especially challenging on weekends and at night.
- **Aged care services:** The population is ageing and consumers were concerned about the inadequate number of residential care beds. They were also concerned with the cost of services and accessing them, discharge planning and social isolation. Carers need increased support and access to information. Palliative care and advanced care planning were also identified needs.
- **Workforce problems:** Forum participants were concerned about the shortage of GPs and the aging GP workforce. Some GPs have closed their books and it can be difficult to arrange home visits.

- **Access to information:** Across all the issues discussed it became clear there are major gaps in knowledge and public awareness of what health services are available and how to access them. Consumers want increased information about services available in both the hospital and the community (including primary care).
- **Carer respite and support** was another strong theme. Participants told us about the difficulties faced by carers and the limited resources available to support them, including flexible respite. Education and information are needed, and there is a need to recognise young children who are carers in families.
- **Impact of bushfire on access to health care:** Consumers want to know that adequate disaster planning has been undertaken, and that they know what to do in the event of an emergency for the management of their health.
- **Access to health services:** Participants told us that having to travel long distances for access to health services caused them difficulties when they are ill. Long waiting lists for GPs and specialists meant that people often attended emergency departments instead.
- **Renal Dialysis:** Participants told us that people who require dialysis need to be able to access that service at Katoomba. They currently travel to Nepean Hospital where they have to carry heavy equipment a long distance due to the parking situation. They cannot travel by train because of the possibility of infection.
- **Increase in holistic care:** Consumers told us that there is a need for people who have mental health and cancer conditions and who are elderly to be able to access affordable holistic care. They want support and advocacy for holistic care.

## Recommendations

Following the Blue Mountains Community Forums, the Interim Joint Consumer Committee made 14 recommendations. These are listed below, with consumer quotes *italicised*, and in more detail on pages 20-21. Progress on the recommendations to date is reported on page 22. It is recommended that:

**Recommendation 1:** A centralised information access point is developed and resourced for the entire region for consumers and health service staff.

*'Knowing what services are available and who and where to contact.'*

**Recommendation 2:** The Medicare Local and the Local Health District develop a comprehensive communication plan that covers internal and external communications for consumers, including the establishment of a senior communications manager position.

*'People like to be listened to and to know about health services and why decisions are made.'*

**Recommendation 3:** The complex transport and parking issues raised by consumers are tabled and addressed by high-level transport stakeholders.

*'The cost of transport and parking is just too high.'*

**Recommendation 4:** The Medicare Local advocates for improved aged care services including the provision of nursing home beds and home care support.

**Recommendation 5:** More information is made available to workers and consumers about planning for end of life care.

**Recommendation 6:** The health workforce (GPs, nurses, allied health professionals and specialists) is increased in order to reduce waiting lists and improve timely access to both acute and primary care.

*'Waiting lists for GPs and specialised services are huge.'*

**Recommendation 7:** The Blue Mountains Health Consumer Working Group agenda includes consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and the diverse groups in the community including culturally and linguistically diverse communities and youth, as well as people with low incomes, the homeless and other vulnerable groups.

**Recommendation 8:** Carer support services and resources are increased as per the NSW Carers Charter and the NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010.

*'Carers are integral to health care and need to be recognised and be part of the process.'*

**Recommendation 9:** Consumers who are admitted to hospital and their relatives be given clear instructions on what process they should follow if they experience any difficulties.

*'When things go wrong we don't know where to turn for help.'*

**Recommendation 10:** The Medicare Local engages with the Local Disaster Plan led by the Blue Mountains City Council and local emergency services regarding consumers' health needs and access to services in the event of disaster.

**Recommendation 11:** The Medicare Local and Local Health District collaborate to implement illness prevention and wellbeing programs appropriate to the population.

*'Preventative health care needs a higher priority to prevent health problems eventuating.'*

**Recommendation 12:** The Working Group works in partnership with local organisations and other relevant stakeholders to address the health issues and gaps identified, and provides regular feedback to the community.

**Recommendation 13:** Resources for health services are increased to meet the special needs of the Blue Mountains, a regional area on the outskirts of a major city.

**Recommendation 14:** Best practice holistic care is researched and supported, especially for people who have a mental health condition, cancer, or are elderly, and the Medicare Local advocates for better access to holistic care.