
Community Report on the Hawkesbury Community Forums on Health: **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

(incorporating the results of the
online Hawkesbury Health Community Survey)

held Monday 15 October 2012

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 Hawkesbury 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 forums were held on Monday 15 October 2012 and were attended by 120 people. The forums were supplemented by an online survey for residents of the Hawkesbury Local Government Area (LGA) to have their say on health services in the region, to which 32 people responded.

Forum and survey participants provided positive feedback about health services including the Hawkesbury District Health Service (HDHS) volunteers and staff, Peppercorn Community Transport, the local ambulance service, and GP care and diagnosis. They also identified a range of problems. Some were specific to the Hawkesbury while others were shared by participants at Community Forums held in other LGAs. The main problems identified include:

Transport and the related issues of distance, time, cost and parking, as well as aged and disability friendly transport, were considered significant issues for Hawkesbury consumers. They present impediments to accessing health services not available locally, for example services for cancer patients, some sexual and reproductive health services and services for victims of sexual assault.

Aged care services: Consumers told us there is a strong need for increased Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) services and aged care beds. The problem is compounded by insufficient residential services for other high needs groups who share the aged care facilities.

Workforce shortage and access to specialist care: Consumers told us of many problems related to the health workforce shortage, especially problems in access to specialists.

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; these are major barriers to timely access. Consumers want greater information about services available in both hospital and the community.

Mental health services: Consumers were very concerned about the often limited mental health services, distances involved accessing inpatient care, use of sedation and restraint whilst being transferred, and the need for simpler pathways to mental health support. It was reported that youth-specific mental health services appear to have been withdrawn.

Impact of flood and bushfire on access to health care: Participants told us that when flood affects the Hawkesbury region it has a major impact on people's access to services. There is no ambulance service west of the river. Consumers want to know that adequate disaster planning has been undertaken and that it includes how emergency and basic health needs can be met in such circumstances. Bushfire can have a similar impact.

Cancer treatment: Lack of access to cancer treatment locally, and the resulting travel to the closest centre in Penrith, has a negative impact upon patients and their families.

Carer support and respite: Support for carers was another theme that emerged. Participants told us about the difficulties faced by carers and the limited resources available to support them. They want more say in the care of their loved one, and a more flexible approach.

Boundaries and cross-border use of health services: One issue that repeatedly came up concerned people who live outside the region who need to use the health services in the Hawkesbury, and Hawkesbury consumers using out of area services. While consumer wanted this flexibility they were concerned it may have negative resource implications for their region.

Recommendations

Following the Hawkesbury 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 pages 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 communication 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, home care support and ACAT services.

Recommendation 5: The Medicare Local and the Local Health District advocate for improved mental health services (acute services, youth access and transport) based in the Hawkesbury.

Recommendation 6: Resources and funding for health services be increased to meet the special needs of the Hawkesbury, a regional area on the outskirts of a major city.

Recommendation 7: The health workforce, in particular GPs, specialists and aged care professionals, is increased to reduce waiting lists and improve timely access for both acute and primary care.

Recommendation 8: The agenda for the proposed Hawkesbury Health Consumer Working Group includes consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and people from other cultures living in the community.

Recommendation 9: Research is conducted into gaps and access problems in the provision of women's health services, sexual and reproductive health services and services for sexual assault victims.

Recommendation 10: The Medicare Local connects with the local disaster management committee regarding consumers' health needs in the event of disaster.

Recommendation 11: 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 12: 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 13: 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 14: The Working Group engages with relevant stakeholders to address the health issues and service gaps identified in this report and to provide regular feedback to the community about progress.