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

(Incorporating the results of the
online Nepean Health Community Survey)

held Wednesday 14 November 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 Nepean 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 Nepean Community Forums were held on Wednesday 14 November 2012 and were attended by a total of 76 people. The forums were supplemented by an online survey for residents of the Penrith Local Government Area (LGA) to have their say on health services in the region, to which 11 residents responded.

Forum and survey participants provided a number of positive stories and comments about local health services. In particular, participants were clear about praising hospital services, including doctors, nurses and other health professionals, and community services including community transport staff. They were seen as doing their best, often with severe resource shortages.

A range of problems was identified as summarised below. Some were specific to the Nepean while others were shared by participants at the Community Forums on Health held in other LGAs (Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Lithgow).

Transport and related issues of availability, distance, parking and cost were key issues.

Aged care services: Consumers told us there is a strong need for aged care advocacy for both home care and nursing home care.

Workforce problems: Forum participants were concerned about the shortage of GPs, specialists and allied health providers impacting on waiting lists, and access to bulk billing. Some GPs close their books and it can be difficult to arrange home visits. Waiting time in surgeries was considered problematic.

Access to information: Consumers want more information on services and how to access them, from a centralised source. Penrith youth require information about services and costs.

Boundaries and cross-border use of health services: Participants want clarity about the resource implications if people who live outside the region use health services within the LGA.

Safety and security within health facilities: Concerns were raised about safety and security in health services, especially hospitals. Consumers were also concerned about infections like MRSA.

Rapid growth and the increasing diversity of the Penrith population were raised several times. The increasing complexity of, and demand for, health services impacts on all aspects of health service provision including issues of workforce and service availability.

Communication problems were identified within and between hospitals, primary health care settings, allied health and specialists: consumers want improved connectivity between all health providers. Carers need to be consulted wherever possible.

Health services for the homeless: Consumers were aware of the high rates of homelessness in the Penrith area; this vulnerable group needs better access to health services.

Men's Health was considered 'not well supported' in the area.

Renal Dialysis: Consumers reported a shortage of services and programs, and problems with access due to transport and parking.

Dental services: A range of problems was raised including the cost, waiting lists and difficulty accessing and transferring dental records.

Multidisciplinary treatment: Consumers called for formal recognition of more holistic treatment in hospitals and general practices. Consideration of evidenced-based alternate therapies was seen as a way of taking the pressure off the medical system.

Recommendations

Following the Nepean Community Forums, the Interim Joint Consumer Committee made twelve recommendations. These are listed below, with consumer quotes *italicised*, and in more detail on pages 21-22. Progress on the recommendations to date is reported on page 23. It is recommended that:

Recommendation 1: Acentralised 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 and home care support.

Recommendation 5: The health workforce (GPs, nurses, allied health professionals and hospital staff) 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 6: The Nepean Health Consumer Working Group agenda includes consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, culturally and linguistically diverse community members and youth, as well as with people experiencing homelessness and people living with disabilities and their carers.

Recommendation 7: The consumer needs of new arrivals from diverse backgrounds in the Nepean are considered by the proposed local Consumer Working Group.

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: The Medicare Local and the Local Health District collaborate to implement illness prevention and wellbeing programs that are appropriate to population needs.

Recommendation 10: Consumers who are admitted to hospital and their relatives are 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 11: The Local Health District works to increase worker, patient and visitor safety at all health facilities.

Recommendation 12: The Nepean Health Consumer Working Group works in partnership with local and community organisations and other relevant stakeholders to address the health issues and gaps identified in this report and to provide regular feedback to the community.