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Shaping the Future of Ageing: Wentworth Healthcare Hosts Inaugural Healthy Ageing Conference

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN), held their inaugural Healthy Ageing Conference at the Western Sydney Conference Centre in Penrith on Saturday 5 April. Over 100 health professionals attended the event including general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals.

Dr Norman Swan, physician, broadcaster and author, was the keynote speaker and MC for the conference which was the first of its kind in the Nepean Blue Mountains region, which spans the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith areas.

The event was opened by Senator Tony Sheldon, Senator for NSW, and provided a full day of education to empower primary healthcare professionals to support older people to live well, for longer, in the community. Presentations by speakers focused on proactive approaches to healthy ageing, including promoting cognitive health, supporting individuals after a dementia diagnosis, fostering social connection, mobility and falls prevention, encouraging good nutrition, managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, and strategies to manage medication. The event provided opportunities for health integration by encouraging connections and information sharing between health professionals.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, said that the conference provided a platform to highlight and acknowledge the crucial role that primary healthcare plays in keeping people healthy and happy as they age, so that they can remain at home for as long as possible.

“We know that more than one in every three general practice visits are now with people aged 65 years and over. This is because the healthcare needs of older people can be complex, with one in two people over 65 years experiencing multiple chronic conditions, as well as increased health risks,” she said.

The ageing population is increasing on a national and local level. In 2017, 3.8 million Australians or 15% of the population were aged over 65 years. By 2057, that number is predicted to increase to 8.8 million, or 22% of the population.

In response to recommendations made through the Royal Commission into Aged Care, the Department of Health and Aged Care provided four year’s funding to Primary Health Networks to implement early intervention initiatives designed to help people stay at home longer and reduce avoidable hospitalisations.

“This funding has allowed us to invest in a range of social connection and social prescribing initiatives, such as Wellbeing Connectors, Health Connectors, Pharmacy Connectors, Community Connectors, Connector Points and Intergenerational Programs that improve older people’s social networks and by extension - their physical and mental wellbeing.”

The critical importance of social connections and agency for older people as they age, was a key theme throughout the conference. The concept of social prescribing, which is a healthcare approach where health professionals, such as GPs, refer patients to community-based activities



and services to improve their health and wellbeing was highlighted. NBMPHN has been leading work in this space locally, with the success of their Intergenerational and Connector Programs.

Ms Reay said that while the initial funding investment as a result of Royal Commission into Aged Care was a step in the right direction, continued and dedicated ongoing funding into early intervention and prevention programs was needed.

“To embed these services in the community and allow programs to be fully evaluated to inform future investments, we need sustainable and predicable funding in the healthy ageing space. Otherwise, programs come and go, and the community can’t rely on them,” she said.

“We need to shift our focus from being a healthcare system that treats people when they’re sick, to a healthcare system that prevents people from becoming sick and keeps people healthier for longer,” said Ms Reay.

“I’d like to express my gratitude to all those involved in the success of the day, with a special thanks to the guest speakers. Your valuable insights and expertise enriched our discussions and helped make this event a success,” said Ms Reay.

“A special mention needs to go to the Healthy Ageing Advisory Committee, which is made up of local clinicians, members of the community and representatives from residential aged care homes, NSW Ambulance and the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District, who helped inform the topics covered on the day.”

“The collaboration and partnerships our organisation has with the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District and other local health stakeholders, is crucial in fostering a truly integrated and holistic approach to improving the health and wellbeing of people living in our community,” she said.

“We are passionate about cultivating a ‘one health system’ mindset for patients as they journey from one part of the health system to another. We’ve been working with our colleagues in residential aged care homes, NSW Ambulance and Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District for many years to bring our local health system together, particularly in the healthy ageing space, and this successful Conference is just one example of our collective effort,” she concluded.

To learn more about the programs and supports available for older people in the Nepean Blue Mountains region, visit www.nbmphn.com.au/healthyageing