



WAPHA
WA Primary Health Alliance

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PERTH NORTH, PERTH SOUTH,
COUNTRY WA
An Australian Government Initiative

Media Release

8 December 2015

New coalition to revive WA primary health sector

As chronic disease spirals in Australia, a new organisation has been given a mandate to advance primary health care in Western Australia and start to ease the care burden on the hospital system.

Mid this year the WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) successfully won the tender to operate the Federal Government three Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in WA, thanks to the support of the State's key primary health providers, to enhance the quality and availability of care available to patients within the community.

WAPHA Chief Executive Officer Leanne Durrington said WA has a fragmented health system which is struggling to cope with the massive growth in chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory problems and mental health conditions.

"With more than half of all Australians now living with chronic disease, WAPHA has a mandate to work with clinicians and providers to ensure integrated care for all patients," explained Ms Durrington.

"Currently the WA health system is overburdened. We have a situation of rising costs, increasing consumer expectation, and fragmented care. Too often care is delivered in hospitals when it could be managed within the community by primary health providers such general practitioners."

"WAPHA's mission is to ensure patients have access to the right care, at the right time, in the right place and ease pressure on WA's already over-burdened hospital system."

"It's a system redesign that's informed by clinicians, patients and the community."

COALITION OF THE WILLING

WAPHA evolved earlier this year from an unprecedented partnership of like-minded, primary health providers in WA.

WAPHA Chair and immediate Australian Medical Association past president Richard Choong said more than 20 organisations were engaged at WAPHA's initial inception, united by a willingness to transform WA's primary health system.

"Silver Chain, St John Ambulance, GP representatives, the Pharmacy Guild, Diabetes WA, WA Association Mental Health – amongst others – have been engaged from the outset in what we refer to as the 'coalition of the willing'," said Dr Choong.

"All are on the frontline in the management of chronic diseases within our community and perform vital roles within the patient care journey, but this is the first time that they have united under one umbrella to integrate patient care and stop service fragmentation."



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Ms Durrington added, “With one in five Australians affected from multi-chronic diseases, otherwise known as ‘comorbidity’, it is crucial that primary health providers are unified in their approach to achieve better patient outcomes.”

OBESITY

Australia is the 5th most obese country in the OECD according to their recent review of the nation’s health care system. This spiralling epidemic is now giving rise to a growth in diabetes and other chronic conditions that ultimately lead to hospitalisation.

Ms Durrington said WAPHA has been established to plan and develop services in the primary health system to deal with the chronic issues associated with obesity, that until now have been previously put in the too hard basket.

“For example 90% of Australians with type two diabetes are obese or overweight. This is a critical issue for our already over-stretched health sector unless we do something – and soon – to prevent the inevitable hospitalisations from chronic diseases.”

But there is hope, according to Ms Durrington.

“Research by Curtin University has found that 21% of hospital admissions in WA – that’s more than one in five – could be prevented if the patient had received early health intervention and disease management from primary health practitioners.”

“The reality is that chronic conditions – such as those triggered by obesity – are here and we need a system that is able to cope with it. Change must begin now to reverse the problems of a fragmented health system.”

MENTAL HEALTH

The recent shake up of the mental health system announced by the Federal Government last month has provided a specific reform agenda for WAPHA.

Ms Durrington said WAPHA will begin by improving outcomes for people with severe and complex mental health needs, enabling local demand to drive local services.

“We are establishing local community engagement and clinical committees throughout Perth and regional WA, as well as partnerships with those on the frontline such as the WA Mental Health Commission and WA Department of Health.

“Change will be gradual to ensure no one slips through the net, but ultimately we want to see people with complex mental health needs offered coordinated care packages, referred by a GP and delivered by the primary health sector overseen by the PHNs.”



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“The change management we are undertaking is less about spending money and more about better use of existing investment through the identification of gaps, and re-balancing as well as inter-connecting care.

“Ultimately, it’s about better outcomes for patients with complex issues.”

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Media contact:

Nyomi Horgan @ gtmedia |9227 8195|0412 415 573| nyomi@gtmedia.com.au

Emma-Jane Morcombe @ gtmedia |9227 8195|0439 272 262|

emmajane@gtmedia.com.au