

MEDIA RELEASE

JULY 2, 2010



OPPORTUNITY FOR PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN TASMANIA

The release of a national report on potential geographic boundaries for the new primary health care organisations (PHCOs) by the Federal Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, yesterday provides a welcome opportunity for primary health care in Tasmania, according to General Practice Tasmania spokesperson, Dr Judith Watson.

The independent report recommends establishing a single PHCO (or Medicare Local) covering Tasmania with three branch offices in the South, North and North West.

Dr Watson supported the recommendation saying that: "it is consistent with our expectations that these organisations will need to be of sufficient size to be able to operate efficiently and effectively.

"We are also pleased with the recognition of the local focus needed in Tasmania to reflect our population distribution and the way in which our health services are organised" she said.

The Federal Government has announced that the first group of Medicare Locals (approximately 15 organisations) will commence operation in mid 2011, with the remainder commencing in mid 2012 and that they will be drawn where possible from the Divisions of General Practice. PHCOs will be responsible for improving and co-ordinating GP and primary care services in local communities and that their first task will be to improve access to after-hours GP services.

"The proposed model is consistent with discussions that have already occurred among the Divisions of General Practice in Tasmania and we are keen to be among the initial group of 15 PHCOs. We see this as a logical evolution of the work that Divisions in Tasmania are already undertaking and we plan to develop a proposal that is ready to submit to government when expressions of interest or tenders are called for.

"We have an ideal opportunity now to collaborate to establish a single PHCO in Tasmania and to plan services on a statewide basis but at the same time to maintain the regional presence that has been so important to us and will preserve our local experience, relevance and responsiveness.

"It will be critical that we build strong links to local communities, health professionals and service providers, so that we can respond effectively to local need and we will be spending the coming months talking to these groups and to all levels government to ensure that our proposal is well informed and collaboratively planned." Dr Watson said.

(ENDS)

Contact: Dr Judith Watson, Deputy Chair, General Practice Tasmania

Tel: (03) 6224 1114

The General Practice Tasmania Network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. The General Practice Tasmania Network is a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

