

POSITION STATEMENT

JUNE 2010



PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC DISEASE

The World Health Organisation defines chronic conditions as "health problems that require ongoing management over a period of years or decades" and acknowledges the significant impact of chronic disease on individuals, the community and the health system.¹

International evidence demonstrates that social, economic, cultural and environmental factors impact on the risk factors that lead to chronic illness, the incidence of chronic conditions in the community, and the way in which risk factors and chronic conditions are managed and services are utilised. Globally, people from socially disadvantaged groups experience higher levels of chronic disease and mortality than those from more advantaged groups. In Tasmania, lower levels of individual income and education, coupled with risk factors such as higher rates of smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, risky alcohol consumption, depression and an ageing population impact upon the level of chronic disease experienced by the population.

General Practice Tasmania recognises and supports the central role of general practice in the prevention, early detection and intervention and management of chronic conditions and acknowledges that patient care and support is provided within the broader context of social, health, and wellbeing support structures. General practice provides important links with other sectors including acute care, allied health, consultant specialists and the community sector. The pivotal role of general practice in connecting patients with other sectors requires partnerships at local, state and national levels to ensure whole-of-system approaches to prevention and management of chronic conditions.

General Practice Tasmania urges government at local, State and Commonwealth levels to make resources available for planned, systematic, ongoing care, rather than acute episodic care that is fragmented across sectors. Adequate system responses to the growing burden of chronic disease will include: timely access to accurate information that can be appropriately shared between different providers and services; access to evidence-based guidelines and clinical information systems to support patient care; improved planning and evaluation through the use of reliable population health information at local, state and national levels; and well-supported multidisciplinary, team-based approaches to care.

General Practice Tasmania also recognises the important role of patients and their families in managing their own care, and in being supported to access health information and community programs, make healthy lifestyle choices, and use evidence based self-management support programs.

Policy implementation and system reform at all levels must provide opportunities for GP engagement to ensure that the central role of general practice in the continuum of care, the management of complex and chronic disease, illness prevention and early intervention is clearly acknowledged. Such a policy shift will require reform of the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) to acknowledge and reward the effort involved in working with patients to prevent and manage complex and chronic conditions.

¹ World Health Organisation, *Innovative care for chronic conditions: building blocks for action: global report*, 2002

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, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

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The General Practice Tasmania Network has developed position statements on various issues relevant to the operation of the health services system and relating to general practice across the State. These position statements reflect the views of Tasmanian GPs and the primary care community.

Each position statement is based upon research and the analysis of relevant literature as well as an assessment of the broader health sector environment. The position statements are developed collaboratively between the State Based Organisation, the three Divisions of General Practice and the Workforce Support Agency within Tasmania. During the development of each statement the Divisions and Workforce Agency consult with their Tasmanian GP members and Boards respectively. Prior to release the statements are ratified by the Boards of each of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network.

Collaboration with other general practice organisations (eg General Practice Training Tasmania, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, etc) is also a feature in the development of some position statements. The co-endorsement of position statements maximises the effectiveness of these statements and represents a strong collective view.

It is expected that position statements will evolve to reflect the ever-changing health and general practice environment. Accordingly feedback and comment is invited to ensure that the position statements continue to be relevant and accurately reflect the views of the Tasmanian general practice and primary care community.

To provide feedback on any position statement please contact any of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network:



GENERAL PRACTICE SOUTH
CONTACT DETAILS
Chair: Dr Elizabeth Webber
Executive Officer: Mr Richard McKercher
Telephone: 6208 7300



GENERAL PRACTICE NORTH
CONTACT DETAILS
Chair: Dr Beth Mulligan
Chief Executive Officer: Mr Phil Edmondson
Telephone: 6331 9296



GENERAL PRACTICE NORTH WEST
CONTACT DETAILS
Chair: Mr Daryl Guest
Executive Officer: Ms Elvie Hales
Telephone: 6425 0800



GENERAL PRACTICE WORKFORCE
CONTACT DETAILS
Chair: Dr Annette Douglas
Chief Executive Officer: Mr Peter Barns
Telephone: 6334 2355



GENERAL PRACTICE TASMANIA
CONTACT DETAILS
Chair: Mr Glenn Appleyard
Chief Executive Officer: Ms Sarah Male
Telephone: 6224 1114

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