

# POSITION STATEMENT

AUGUST 2009



## PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

An outbreak of pandemic influenza poses a significant threat to the health and wellbeing of the Australian population. A well organised and integrated health care response including a prepared and protected general practice workforce is essential to protect the Australian community in such an environment.

As a likely first point of contact for members of the public affected by pandemic influenza, there are a number of expectations and requirements that will be essential to supporting the role of general practitioners in the various phases of pandemic response.

The General Practice Tasmania (GPT) Network is an active participant in planning and preparing for a pandemic outbreak. The Network's existing infrastructure including information databases, effective communication protocols and consultative mechanisms is of particular relevance to assist in planning the service response to pandemic influenza.

### ***Planning and Preparation***

A variety of plans and protocols exist to support the coordination of the Tasmanian pandemic response. The GPT Network has been actively engaged in planning activities and values ongoing participation. Through the recent outbreak of human swine flu several issues have been identified that may require future plans to be modified. These include the impact of the increased demand for sick certification by members of the community and the question of whether it is necessary for flu clinics to be staffed by medical practitioners including general practitioners (GPs). Review and reflection on the response to date will be essential to inform future preparations.

### ***Communication, Information and Service Coordination***

Effective communication and information exchange is critical to a successful and effective pandemic response. Communication arrangements and protocols need to be planned, tested and refined to ensure their adequacy an ongoing relevance. In Tasmania, the Director of Public Health (Tasmanian State Department of Health and Human Services) is recognised as the authoritative source of information for general practice about the status of the disease, the pandemic alert level, the case definition, procedures for specimen collection and testing and infection control including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and anti-viral medication. In the event of a pandemic the Director of Public Health is also responsible for coordinating the statewide response including the deployment of the general practice workforce and related resources to support the establishment of flu services and flu clinics.

Communications must at all times ensure that general practices are kept informed of any role they may be asked or expected to play in the State's pandemic response.

### ***Training, Resources and Indemnification***

Adequate training and resourcing of general practitioners, nurses and practice staff will be fundamental to a successful response to pandemic influenza. Such training must cover infection control procedures including the appropriate use of PPE and practice protocols for assessment and separation of patients presenting with influenza-like illness. If general practice staff are deployed to support the State's coordinated flu response (either through flu clinics, flu services or within practices) then personal protective equipment and prophylactic anti-virals must be provided to those staff. It is also essential that simple employment arrangements are established that cover remuneration, professional indemnity and workers compensation arrangements for GPs, practice nurses and other practice staff agreeing to work at the direction of the State as part of the pandemic response.

*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:



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