

POSITION STATEMENT

SEPTEMBER 2008



SUSTAINABLE GP WORKFORCE

Workforce shortages (including shortages of general practitioners) are being experienced internationally, nationally and locally across the entire health sector. At the same time, the demand for health services continues to increase due to expectations, demographic change and patterns of disease.

Under current conditions there is expected to be a significant shortfall in the general practitioner workforce in Tasmania in a relatively short period of time. The General Practice Tasmania network believes that urgent action must be taken to both increase the supply of general practitioners to the state as well as to reduce the demand on GP services to address this problem and to avoid ongoing problems of primary care sustainability in Tasmania.

Such action requires reform in government policy, within the education and training sector, within the community and within the general practice profession itself. It must comprise a range of strategies and interventions that address the relationships between availability of workforce, infrastructure, technologies, community expectations and funding. It must also be based on accurate and relevant data and be built around a sound engagement strategy which includes both the providers of health services and the consumer.

Suggested initiatives include:

1. Elimination of barriers to entry into the GP workforce such as prohibitive costs of higher education and infrastructure.
2. Promoting general practice as a rewarding and attractive professional career.
3. Expansion of integrated and collocated primary care teams in which GPs increasingly work together with other health care professionals in the care of their patients.
4. Continued introduction of new and more integrated models of care and the development of an evidence base to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of these models.
5. The introduction of a multidisciplinary health education curriculum.
6. Relaxation of regulations in education and training, in particular, to either abolish or increase quotas for GP registrar training places.
7. Exploration of new service delivery funding mechanisms, such as pooled regionalised funding and other flexible arrangements.
8. Efforts to increase community awareness of the need for a healthy lifestyle and provision of greater support for the community in adopting healthy habits, skills and resources to improve their own health.
9. Community education about the cost of services, looming scarcity, and facilitated public debate about resource allocation decisions.

In planning for such initiatives parties should be mindful of the demands and influences on both the current and future general practice workforce and acknowledge the elements of sustainability already integrated into the most functional practices and build upon these in developing their wider application.

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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