

## **FACT SHEET**

**11 August 2021**

## **YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

Each fortnight, Care For Our Region will address key questions raised by local communities. In the first of the series, we look at the impact on the economy of a new health service in the Wimmera and Northern Grampians region.

### **The Bottom Line**

A proposed new health service will support further investment in local services and career opportunities in the community. Less people travelling unnecessarily for treatment will mean more people staying in our community, which will offer a direct benefit to the local economy.

### **What are the key issues?**

#### **Healthcare in the Wimmera and Northern Grampians Region:**

- In 2018-19, only 77% of the public hospital care of Wimmera residents was provided within the region, down from 81% in 2014-15. This means at least 1000 residents travel outside of the region for hospital admissions. A further 1200 people travel outside of region for specialist care, meaning up to 40 people travel outside the region for hospital-based care per week.
- Currently at Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital only 2 of 20 acute beds are used each day and there is an occupancy level of only 55% in aged care
- On average, only 12 of the 26 beds at Stawell Regional Hospital are used each day, aged care occupancy sits at 55 per cent and wait times are extended for outpatient allied health services including physiotherapy and podiatry.
- In the Northern Grampians Region, more than 600 people travel or are transferred to Ballarat for acute/emergency healthcare every year.
- At least half of this additional demand is being absorbed by Ballarat Health Services.
- A proportion of these people who travel outside the region must do so to receive tailored care based on their clinical needs.

#### **Why is this an issue?**

- Any declining activity in the Wimmera and Northern Grampians region leads to a reduced critical mass, which undermines the specialist activity required to attract and maintain clinical expertise.
- This is particularly evident for services like paediatrics, obstetrics and neonatology, cardiology, orthopaedics, urology and general surgery at Wimmera Health Care Group.
- Wimmera Health Care Group spends \$9.6m a year on temporary staff, money that could be spent on permanent staff in Horsham.
- Right now, Horsham is recruiting for at least 20 clinical and auxiliary staff, and that is not considering potential for additional specialist services.
- Community members across Wimmera, Edenhope and Stawell currently bear the economic burden for time lost at work and the cost of travel, which wouldn't occur if treatment could happen locally.

#### **What does this new health service mean for the local economy?**

- The proposed health service intends to fill and build on these service gaps.

- If we can ensure one quarter of the 1000 hospital admissions – while remaining clinically appropriate – stay in Horsham rather than go to Ballarat, this could return hundreds of thousands and potentially millions of dollars in lost local economic activity.
- Increasing the service provision and improving the integration of services across the region can reduce the costs of having to travel outside of our district for care, resulting in lost time at work, transport costs of petrol and parking, and sometimes accommodation, and support local retailers and other businesses.
- Once the patient transfer and transport systems and processes have been implemented the benefits will be ongoing, giving security to all health services and ensure the provision of sustainable health services well into the future.
- The proposed new health service intends to fill and build on service gaps, leading to more career opportunities and roles for staff and better choices of services for the community.
- In Horsham, if we also could convert any locum staff into permanent local jobs – which is our intent, particularly in specialist services – a proportion of \$9.6m in locum costs would also come back the community.

### How does this happen?

- Should approval be given, we will hit the ground running. There are already discussions with Ballarat Health Services about plastic surgery for skin cancers, orthopaedics, paediatrics, and dental shared capability, in Horsham.
- For longer term priorities, we will undertake joined-up planning, looking at all services currently delivered and understand how best to fill those gaps. We will undertake this process with our staff, our clinicians and the community.

### What about procurement and local businesses – won't they go to Ballarat?

- Every health service aims to support local businesses where it is possible and financially appropriate and responsible to do so. Existing contracts and services, be it laundry, IT, catering or cleaning, will not change as a direct result of the voluntary amalgamation.
- Fundraising for each health services will go directly back into that local health service as it does now.

**The Boards of Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital, Stawell Regional Health, Wimmera Health Care Group and Ballarat Health Services believe they will be healthier, stronger, together.**

For more information or to have your say visit [careforourregion.com.au/](http://careforourregion.com.au/).

**Ends**