

Dear Community Health CEOs

It has been a busy few months for the Community Health Taskforce. I would like to thank the many people from across the community health and health services sectors who have contributed to the work of the Taskforce to date.

The Community Health Taskforce presents an opportunity for the sector to have their say about the role of community health services in the future, and importantly how that role can be strengthened.

The Taskforce has a membership that is representative of the community health sector, but also includes representation from our partners in the wider health sector, including a service user representative.

As Chair of the Taskforce, and on behalf of the members, I am pleased to provide an update on the work of the Taskforce over the past six months.

Overview of activities

There have been six meetings of the Taskforce since August 2018. Each of these meetings has been characterised by robust and productive discussions around the current and future role of community health. In particular, how to strengthen the capability and capacity of the community health platform to meet the needs of Victoria's disadvantaged and priority populations.

In between meetings, members of the Taskforce have been actively leading and participating in a range of activities including:

- a comprehensive consultation process with the broader sector (facilitated by the Victorian Healthcare Association)
- targeted workshops to explore key elements of a new strategic framework for community health including workshops on funding models, integrated service models and outcomes.
- reviewing international examples of best practice to inform potential sector-wide enhancements
- informing technical pieces of work that were identified in the 2018 VAGO Audit of the Community Health Program including a review of the unit price for the program, and a review of the demand management framework and tools.

Stakeholder consultation summary

The Taskforce, in partnership with the Victorian Healthcare Association conducted a consultation process inviting contributions from health and community service agencies, service users and other stakeholders from across Victoria.

This included four targeted workshops in Shepparton, Traralgon, Melbourne CBD and Ballarat. An additional two workshops were held in Melbourne with CEOs of community health agencies. Spark Strategy also facilitated eleven targeted interviews and conducted an online survey for a broad range of stakeholders, including consumers.

Members of the Taskforce have been actively engaged in the consultations, and as Chair I have had the opportunity to visit several community health services across the state and hold discussions with staff and service users.

The consultation process explored a range of views around the role of community health, including services offered and to whom. Key themes from the consultation include:

- community health services are well-placed to meet the needs of their local communities but could play a greater role in supporting the wider health system.
- there are barriers to innovation and collaboration, including resource challenges and funding arrangements
- the administrative impact of clinical governance reporting and other regulatory requirements often compound resourcing challenges

Current and future role of community health

The Taskforce has discussed the strategic opportunities for the community health platform as a provider of integrated health and social care services.

To inform this thinking, the Taskforce developed a description of the core role of community health:

Community health services provide a platform that enables the health and wellbeing of communities by reducing health gaps and improving system sustainability.

They focus on people who experience poor service availability, cost barriers, stigma and discrimination and complexity of needs.

Building on this core role, the Taskforce is considering opportunities to build the capability of the platform to contribute to key objectives for the health system including:

- addressing healthcare gaps, including gaps caused by market failure
- improving integration through wrap around health and social care for disadvantaged cohorts
- improving linkages and partnerships with the acute sector to reduce demand on hospitals and build system sustainability

Further detail around the case for change, and approaches to innovation and reform for community health will be incorporated as part of our report to government later this year.

Unit Price Review

The Taskforce has also been engaged in activities in response to the VAGO Audit of the Community Health Program. This includes a review of the unit price paid for allied health and nursing services under the Community Health Program, to ensure that it reflects the true cost of service delivery.

The Taskforce noted findings of the review that:

- the unit price is generally higher than that paid by other service payers such as WorkSafe and TAC
- the level of service delivered per dollar of funding varied significantly across agencies
- there are variations in attitudes about the unit price, with some services considering that the current unit price was sufficient and supported flexible service delivery, while others raised concerns such as lack of granularity and exclusions
- some services provided feedback that the unit price did not adequately support the integrated service models required for more complex clients, for example by meeting costs associated with care coordination

The review did not establish a basis for any adjustment to the unit price but recommended that further funding model reform be undertaken by the department, underpinned by broader consultation and a robust cost study.

Next steps

Over the coming months, Taskforce members will be drawing on the stakeholder consultations and ongoing deliberations to develop their advice on the future direction of community health. The Taskforce will provide its advice to the Victorian Government by June 2019.

Phillip Bain

Chair

Community Health Taskforce

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/community-health/community-health-taskforce>