Welcome

Welcome to the second issue of the Hunter Valley Health Services Planning Project newsletter – designed to keep you informed about the project and its progress.

The NSW Government has committed $20 million toward planning for improved health services for the people of Maitland and the Hunter Valley and to acquire land for a proposed new hospital.

The Hunter Valley Health Services Planning Project has been formed to deliver on that commitment. As well as selecting a site, the project also includes planning for clinical services for the proposed new hospital and for the existing network of hospitals and community health services in Maitland, Cessnock, Dungog, Singleton, Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter.

NEXT EDITION:
- Due out in May 2013

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
- A range of fact sheets and other information is available on our project website at: www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hunter_valley_health_services
- Email: hne-hvp@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au
- Call us: 02 4939 2280

Consultations paint a picture for future health services

The latest round of consultations by Hunter New England Health to develop a clinical services plan (CSP) for public health services in the Hunter Valley is well underway and will continue to the end of April.

The planning team is consulting widely across the Hunter Valley with community leaders and representatives, health partners such as Hunter Medicare Local, and with HNE Health clinicians, management and staff to help build a picture of the type of health services needed for the future and how they should be organised.

The plan, expected to be completed mid-year will also guide how we can structure and organise our services in the future to:
- help improve the health and wellbeing of our communities
- improve patients' experience and access to health services and care they need, and
- provide good value for our limited health dollars.

These consultations are reporting back on service needs and challenges raised in initial consultations late last year (see over page) and discussing where to from here.

They are providing valuable input but are just one part of the picture. We are also collecting and analysing activity data for our services and other health data, exploring health care policy directions, and reviewing the relevant research and literature to help us develop the clinical services plan.

Although not yet completed, the clinical services plan is very likely to show that business as usual is no longer an option and that some level of change will be needed, says HNE Health’s executive leader on the project, Karen Kelly.

“Clearly, building a major new hospital will require some changes to what we currently do and how and where we do it to ensure our health network is providing the best care possible for the people of the Hunter Valley,” Ms Kelly said.

Community input …

The project team has met with a host of community and clinical groups, including:

- Cessnock Retired Mineworkers
- Singleton Council representatives
- Doctors at Maitland Hospital
- Dungog Health Forum

“It will also help us keep pace with community needs and with rapid advancements and changes in health care.”
Hospital network plays vital role

While people right across the Hunter Valley will benefit from a new major hospital in the region, other improvements in health service delivery can also be expected from the clinical service planning currently underway.

Our existing hospitals and community health centres are part of an established network of health services that is designed to support each other and help ease pressure on the area’s main referral hospital at Maitland.

“We know from current experience that not all services can be available at every site, but we can make them accessible within the broader network,” HNE Health’s executive lead on the project, Karen Kelly, said.

“We would expect that high-end acute health services for complex care – such as intensive care and specialist obstetric, paediatric, medical and surgical services – will be concentrated in the new hospital.

“But we are also looking at the broad spectrum of health care, including outpatient and day-only surgery services, rehabilitation services and community-based primary care health services.

“We recognise the important role that our smaller hospitals play in their communities and in the network of services.

“Recommendations for future services at these other facilities will build on the strengths of existing services and, where possible, look to enhance local hospital and community-based services to provide the health care needed closer to home.”

No decision yet on new hospital site

Expressions of interest to identify possible sites for the proposed new hospital closed at the end of January. Many submissions were received from both private landholders and government agencies and these are now being assessed as part of a rigorous and detailed evaluation process.

A preferred site will be identified by mid-year and a process to acquire the site will follow.

Hunter New England Health Chief Executive Michael DiRienzo said no site has yet been selected.

“Understandably, there has been a lot of interest in this project and there has been some speculation in the community and media about possible sites. People will have differing opinions about the best location,” he said.

“Our aim is to find the most suitable site available for the proposed new hospital.”

On health needs and challenges, you said ...

The first round of community and staff consultations to inform the clinical services planning was held late last year.

Between October and December, we spoke with almost 700 people in 86 meetings and workshops across the region.

We asked our community stakeholders about the health needs and issues for their communities. Access to GPs (especially after hours), mental health, allied health and specialist services, chronic disease, age-related conditions (such as dementia, injuries from falls), and cancer were among the main issues.

Not surprisingly then, some of the key priorities raised included:

- Increased access to after-hours medical services and bulk-billing GPs
- Improved access to mental health and allied health services
- More specialist outreach services, and
- Enhanced oncology services

Parking and transport were also universal topics.

We also asked our doctors, nurses, allied health, managers and support staff for their input on any service gaps and the challenges ahead for local health services.

Workforce challenges loomed large.

Like the population generally, the health sector also has an ageing workforce and access to a skilled and specialist health workforce will be a critical issue.

Networking and patient flow between services, closer integration between acute and community health services and with non-government service providers, and meeting community needs and expectations were also raised.

Infrastructure, resources, technology, transport, training and education were also consistently raised.

HNE Health’s executive leader on the project, Karen Kelly, said recommendations from the clinical services plan will help meet the challenges.

“We are faced with delivering extremely costly health care to a growing population who are getting older,” said Ms Kelly, who is also Director of Nursing and Midwifery for Hunter New England Local Health District.