

October 2016

Progress towards a Healthcare Consumer Organisation for Tasmania

In September 2015, the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) was engaged by Primary Health Tasmania to undertake foundational work to scope the need for, and to support the potential establishment of, a healthcare consumer organisation (HCO) in Tasmania. Currently Tasmania is the only Australian state without a HCO.

Potential benefits

Consultations to date have been extremely encouraging and attracted wide participation. The key roles of health consumer organisations in other states were also reviewed in order to inform a potential Tasmanian model.

Consultations demonstrate that a Tasmanian HCO could:

- build an organised consumer movement in Tasmania
- provide health planners and decision makers in Tasmania with informed strategic policy, health system and service development advice
- provide independent, systemic health consumer advocacy and representation
- facilitate, promote and support health consumer advocacy, networking and leadership
- raise awareness of issues of interest to Tasmanian health care consumers through engagement, information dissemination and training.

The formation of a Tasmanian HCO would be timely, coinciding with the establishment of a single public health service and a single primary health care organisation in Tasmania together with the existence of a major private hospital provider.

These developments, designed to support better coordination and integration of health services across the state, are an excellent platform from which to progress the HCO's establishment.

Current situation

CHF has completed Phase 1 (scoping) of the project. This included a first round of consultations to assess the need, explore the benefits and challenges, and discuss the potential core activities such an organisation might undertake, the opportunities for linkages between organisations and networks, as well as views on funding and governance.

Based on those consultations, in May 2016 the Steering Committee for the project accepted a possible model for the new organisation, including its proposed purpose, funding, governance, role and function, approach to partnership and focus. Each component of the model will need to be developed further in close consultation with local stakeholders and, most importantly, a high level of Tasmanian consumer involvement and ownership. This will occur through the establishment of a local consumer-driven implementation advisory group to determine final organisational and governance arrangements.

Once the situation regarding start-up and recurrent funding for a new HCO becomes clearer, it is anticipated that CHF will recruit a local coordinator to lead this Phase 2 of the project (implementation) and work closely with Tasmanian health consumers.

For more information or to request a copy of the report from Phase 1, please contact the CHF Office on (02) 62735444 or info@chf.org.au.