

Access to health services

Welcome to the second Rural and Remote Health Special Interest Group e-newsletter!

We publish quarterly newsletters covering important topics impacting people living in rural and remote areas. This issue focuses on *Access to health services*.

What is the Rural and Remote Health Special Interest Group?

The special interest group is an informal network of consumers who have self-selected to work more intensively on policy issues.

We currently have 34 members from around Australia, from Darwin to Port Pirie and Kalgoorlie to Ingham.



Each have extensive experience working within the health system (health promotion, aged care, palliative care, disability, dental, mental health, maternity services, clinical nurse, pharmacist, health services management and paramedic).

Some members are consumer representatives, representing consumer views on a number of steering committees and working groups nationwide.

Our members live (or have lived) in rural and remote areas across Australia and offer a wide range of lived experiences, from access

challenges, to living with depression, rare chronic conditions, and complications from medical implants.

Access to Health Services

Availability, affordability and appropriateness are all key dimensions influencing access to health services. People living in rural and remote areas often have poorer access to health services compared to those living in regional areas and major cities.

The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows compared to people living in major cities...

...people in remote areas are more likely to report **barriers to accessing GPs and specialists**...

...For example, the rate of people reporting **not having a GP nearby was 6 times** higher in remote and very remote areas...while people in very remote areas experience **higher rates** (2.5 times) of **potentially preventable hospitalisations**...

In addition, health facilities in rural and remote areas are often **smaller**, have **less resources** and **infrastructure** and are more **widely distributed** compared to those in major cities.

You can view the latest data on Rural and Remote Health [here](#).



Digital health services are increasing people's access to health services in rural and remote areas. For example, did you know [Rural Help](#) works to connect with rural and remote communities to improve psychological wellbeing? Rural Help aims to bring vital mental health services to the bush.



Understanding our own health and how to access the care we need – our health literacy – is now more important than ever.

There are a range of portals available to help connect people to helpful information.

CHF have developed a portal, Be Health Aware, to evidence-based information and resources that act as a guide to the health care choices we need to make, whether in relation to a particular disease, treatment, service or policy.

You can access **Be Health Aware** [here](#).



Consumers Stories

Barry from Digby VIC shared his lived experience of accessing health care services in rural Victoria.

Barry, now an aged pensioner, spent much of his time working in Administrative, Accounting and IT roles, including several years of teaching Business Computing in the TAFE Sector.

In 2011, Barry moved from Melbourne to Digby, a regional town in Victoria's South West, bringing with him five chronic illness and several other conditions. He left behind an incredible GP who had successfully coordinated his treatments since 1996, covering eight specialists, most of whom were located in Box Hill or inner-city area. Barry also had a podiatrist who treated his whole family with a home visit every eight weeks.

The first battle was to find a GP: a process that took several months of asking around and seeking recommendations. In the meantime, Barry returned to Melbourne each month – an 700km round trip – trying to tie together appointments with the GP and specialists each visit.

Eventually, Barry found a GP in Casterton who he felt managed his multiple ailments once they worked out what they were. Barry's Cardiologist then retired, leaving him to find a local one. Eventually, Barry found one in Hamilton. Barry's haematologist referred him to another haematologist in Warrnambool. Progressively, Barry has replaced almost all of his healthcare professionals but is still required to travel a lot to reach them. Hamilton is a 95km round trip and Warrnambool is 270km. His eye specialist is now in Mt Gambier: a round trip of 170km.



“When in pain get on a plane” – a member from the NT shares the common patient experience

Getting access to health services in the Northern Territory is a major challenge due to the small population size and the vast amount of remote and very remote communities.

In the Northern Territory, the range of healthcare services is limited with a lack of specialists and specialised services such as mental service provision.

One common saying in the NT is: “when in pain get on a plane.”

Many Northern Territory residents opt to fly to other capital cities to undergo hospital procedures. The lack of specialists can force people to leave the Northern Territory as their health conditions cannot be managed locally. As a result, many people choose to settle in other areas of Australia which can meet their healthcare needs. One example is getting access to a paediatric cardiologist - in the Northern Territory there is one paediatric cardiologist with waiting times in the public system are up to two years.



Did you know...

...In 2013, CHF conducted a survey to **explore consumer views and perceptions of Telehealth in rural and remote areas...**

...**90%** had heard of Telehealth and Telehealth consultations...

...**over 50%** who had used telehealth believe that it is a **step in the right direction and meets their needs...**

...however, **50%** reported that **technology and availability** was a **major obstacle to their use...**

Consultations and Surveys

Have your say on a national obesity strategy

Overweight and obesity is an issue affecting our whole community. Take action and join in the consultations on a national obesity strategy. You can be a part of creating a healthier future.

There are a number of ways you can provide input including online surveys, community forums and webinars. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Consultation closes **15 Dec 2019**

Australia's Health Panel



Australia's Health Panel is a CHF initiative that helps the consumer voice be heard on the national stage, through timely and high-quality surveys. It is a modern, interactive online platform devoted to harnessing the views of Australians about the state of the nation's health care system.

Each month, a short survey will be sent to Australia's Health Panel, that can be filled in online.

[Click here](#) to find out more information or to register.

Events and Campaigns

FREE Communication Education Seminar: Breaking Down Depression and Building Resilience

About: A 1-hour presentation delivered by a trained presenter who has personal experience of mental health issues or of caring for a loved one. The presentation will provide accurate information about common mental health issues, their causes, how to spot early warning signs, what to do and how to build personal resilience.

This event will be held in Cowra, Mudgee and Bourke.

Event Details:

Cowra: 28 November 2019, 5:30 – 7:30pm
Cowra Services Club, 101 Brisbane Street,
Cowra

Mudgee: 28 November 2019, 5:30 – 7:30pm
Mudgee Golf Club, 21 Robertson Street, Mudgee

Bourke: 4 December 2019, 5:30 – 7:30pm
Bourke Bowling Club (Auditorium, Corner
Richard and Mitchell Streets, Bourke)

For more information or to **RSVP to an event**,
contact Beth Mills (beth.mills@wnswphn.org.au)



Grief, loss and dementia

About: Facilitated by Dementia Australia, these sessions provide an overview of dementia and caring for someone who has dementia. It focuses on practical tools to manage the emotions associated with change, including loss and grief. These sessions are focused on the carer.

This FREE event will be held in Cairns and Townsville

Event details:

Cairns: 19th & 20th November 2019 at 11am – 3pm (each day)

Townsville: 26th & 27th November 2019 at 10am – 2pm (each day)

For more information contact: 1800 588 699 or QLD.bookings@dementia.org.au



7th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium: Shaping the Future

About: It will bring together the rural and remote health sector with policy makers and others in the government and the non-government sectors to shape the future of rural and remote health research.

Date: 25-26 May 2020

Location: Alice Springs Convention Centre, NT

Registrations: open Sunday, 1 December 2019

[Click here](#) for more information.



CHF Summit 2020: Shifting Gears – Save the Date

CHF will be hosting the inaugural Australian and New Zealand Consumer Experience and Leadership in Healthcare Summit on **2-3 September 2020** at the **International Convention Centre in Sydney**.

The Summit will offer both organisations and consumers who want to be at the forefront of system change the opportunity to come together and explore, discuss and grow the concept and practice of consumer-centred care.

The Summit will:

- Support the development of consumer leadership skills

- explore the major policy shifts required to achieve person-centred care systems and services
- showcase exemplary practice in consumer leadership
- bring together consumer leaders with clinical leaders, service providers, researchers and key decision-makers.

If you have any enquiries, please contact Sandra Gardam at event@chf.org.au



Support Brad's MoVember Quest

One of our special interest group members, Brad, is raising much-needed funds for prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health and suicide prevention.

Men die on average 6 years earlier than women. But together we can change that.

To find out more, [click here](#).
To support Brad's fundraising efforts, please [click here](#).

Full Website Links in this Newsletter

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare:
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-health/rural-remote-health/contents/rural-health>

Rural Help:
<https://ruralhelp.com.au/>

Be Health Aware:
<https://chf.org.au/be-health-aware>

National Obesity Strategy Consultation
<https://consultations.health.gov.au/population-health-and-sport-division/national-obesity-strategy/>

Australia's Health Panel:
<https://chf.engageable.net/>

7th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium:
<https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/7rrhss/home>

Movember Australia:
<https://au.movember.com/>

Brad's Movember Fundraising Page:
https://au.movember.com/mospace/12920877?utm_medium=share&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=fundraise

Consumers Health Forum of Australia:
<https://chf.org.au/>

About Consumers Health Forum of Australia

Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is the national peak body representing the interests of Australian healthcare consumers and those with an interest in healthcare consumer affairs. CHF works to achieve safe, quality, timely healthcare for all Australians, supported by accessible health information and systems. Find out more [here](#).

