

**Issue 1, August 2019**

## Access to health services – Travel for Treatment

Welcome to the first e-newsletter for the Rural and Remote Special Interest Group!

### What is the Rural and Remote Health Special Interest Group?

The 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.

CHF recently established a Rural and Remote Health Special Interest Group to ensure we include the voices of rural and remote healthcare consumers in all our policy and advocacy work.

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



The special interest group is an informal network of consumers who have self-selected to work more intensively on policy issues. We currently operate virtually, meeting via teleconference bi-monthly and communicating through an online platform between meetings. CHF see this special interest group as a

precursor to establishing a Rural and Remote Health Forum.

Each month, we will be publishing a newsletter covering important topics impacting people living in rural and remote areas. The topic this month is *Access to health services – Travel for Treatment*.



Australians living in rural and remote areas are more likely to have shorter lives, poorer access to health services, and experience higher levels of injury and disease compared to those living in major cities<sup>1</sup>. While there are a range of factors that influence the disproportionate health burden experienced by those living in rural and remote areas, over 20% of the problem is about access to healthcare. Travelling for treatment is a major barrier to accessing healthcare for those living in rural and remote areas. This can be due to lack of transport available, long travel distances and associated costs.

### Consumers Stories

#### **Brad from Batemans Bay NSW shared his experience of travelling for dialysis treatment.**

When Brad first commenced Dialysis, there was no renal unit in his local area of Batemans Bay, NSW. The closest available was at Canberra Hospital – a 4-hour return trip. With advice from health professionals not to drive after receiving dialysis treatment, Brad had to find his own way to and from each appointment. Brad considers himself lucky,

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017, ‘Rural and Remote Health’, AIHW.

having family and friends around him who were able to assist in getting him to and from appointments.

In 2005, a dialysis unit was opened in Moruya – a 29km drive from Brad's home in Batemans Bay. However, access to transport was still a challenge. With no direct bus route, Brad would often have to leave the day before to ensure he arrived at his appointment on time.

The alternative was leaving his house at 6am, catching multiple buses that would eventually get him to Moruya Hospital by midday. Following four hours of dialysis, Brad would be lucky to make the last bus leaving the hospital at 4pm to make his way back home.



Where possible, Brad would access a community carpooling service, Euro Transport, to get to and from his appointments. While this was a better option than catching the bus, it was not always able to meet the needs of those who required the service – leaving Brad to find an alternative way of getting to and from hospital. To this day, access to transport for treatment remains limited.

You can read more about Brad's health journey and his work as a consumer advocate [here](#).

## Travelling for healthcare

Travelling for treatment can be complex, costly and time consuming for people living in rural and remote areas. However, there are a range of services and resources to help improve accessibility to transport for healthcare.

For example, did you know all States and Territories have **Patient Assisted Travel Schemes** to help ease the financial burden of travelling for treatment? The travel schemes vary, and it is best to enquire directly with your State/Territory about any special requirements you may need.

You can find out more information about the services and resources available on the [Health Direct website](#).

Western NSW Primary Health Network also have a Transport and Accommodation Services Directory. To find out more, [click here](#).

## Did you know...

...The Royal Flying Doctor Service has **71 aircraft** that cover the length and breadth of the country, **23 air bases** and **124 healthcare vehicles**.

In the last year...

...the Royal Flying Doctor Service has **flew 26, 863, 558 km's...**

...transported **75, 311 patients by road** and **38, 064 patients by air...**

...held **16, 209 primary health care clinics...**

...provided **21, 828 episodes of dental care...**

[Click here](#) to find out more about the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

A similar service, Angel Flight, coordinates non-emergency flights to assist people living in rural and remote areas to access treatment. [Click here](#) to find out more.

## Consultations and Surveys



## Mental health and wellbeing in NSW

WayAhead Mental Health Association in NSW is asking people what good mental health and wellness looks like and what they need. The survey covers all aspects of life including community, workplaces and service providers like WayAhead to help people have the best mental health and wellbeing imaginable. They want to hear from as many people as possible throughout NSW. The NSW Wellbeing Survey 2019 is open from 1 August – 31 October 2019. The results will be publicly released in early 2020 and will help inform the future work of WayAhead.

[Complete the survey](#)

## Events and Campaigns

### NPS MedicineWise – Be MedicineWise Week, 19-25 August 2019

This awareness campaign aims to encourage Australians to get to know the language of medicines.

Understanding and communicating about medicines is key to getting the most out of them, safely. To find out more, and to help spread the message [click here](#).



### The Eurobodalla Health & Wellbeing Expo 2019

The Eurobodalla Health Service Community Representative Committee is a link between the community and the Eurobodalla Health Service. As part of their community engagement program, they are excited to once again be holding the Eurobodalla Health & Wellbeing Expo.

The aim of the Expo is to showcase the many & wide-ranging health and wellbeing services that are on offer from providers, non-government organisations, social and craft groups, sporting and recreational organisations, service clubs and associations that locals and visitors can access.

**Where:** Batemans Bay Soldiers Club, Auditorium on Level 1.

**When:** Saturday 12 October 2019, 10am-2pm.

Please contact Brad Rossiter, [bradrossiter521@hotmail.com](mailto:bradrossiter521@hotmail.com), for more information or to request an Expression of Interest Form.

### Women's Health Week, 2-6 September 2019

Jean Hailes Women's Health Week is a week dedicated to all women across Australia to make good health a priority.

Stay tuned during Women's Health Week as valuable health information is released each day.

To find out more information and how you can get involved, visit the [website](#)

## Full Website Links in this Newsletter:

### Brad Rossiter's Health Journey

<https://www.hcnsw.org.au/a-word-with-brad-rossiter/>

### Health Direct - Travelling to your healthcare

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/travelling-to-your-healthcare-appointment>

### Western NSW PHN – Transport and Accommodation Services Directory

<https://www.wnswphn.org.au/your-health-services/services-directory>

### Royal Flying Doctor Service

<https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/what-we-do/>

### Angel Flight

<https://www.angelflight.org.au/>

### The NSW Wellbeing Survey 2019

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2RPTKXW>

### NPS MedicineWise – Be MedicineWise Week

[https://www.nps.org.au/assets/NPS2225\\_BMW\\_2019\\_Campaign\\_Toolkit\\_v4\\_sml.pdf](https://www.nps.org.au/assets/NPS2225_BMW_2019_Campaign_Toolkit_v4_sml.pdf)

### Women's Health Week

<https://www.womenshealthweek.com.au/the-week/>