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PORTLAND
DISTRICT HEALTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Towards a sustainable medical healthcare workforce in Portland report released

Report provides roadmap to support staff and secure Portland District Health's long-term future

Towards a sustainable medical healthcare workforce in Portland (Hillis Review) – the review prepared by Associate Professor David Hillis into the healthcare workforce model at Portland District Health (PDH) – has been publicly released today.

Conducted by Associate Professor Hillis in January 2019 and delivered in June 2020, the report provides recommendations to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of the health service for Portland residents and the surrounding community.

The Chair of Portland District Health, Professor Peter Matthews said he was proud to be associated with such a committed team at PDH, focused on safe, quality healthcare – and the release of the *Hillis Review* provided an opportunity to come together and unite behind the health service.

“This report highlights that our workforce is capable and committed, but deep-seated structural problems – that have formed over many years – are putting significant pressure on their ability to deliver quality healthcare for our community,” he said.

“It’s clear that we all need to constructively work together to make changes that will ensure PDH delivers quality healthcare in our region now and into the future.”

The report was released with the support of South West Healthcare, Western District Health Service and the Department of Health.

The *Towards a sustainable medical healthcare workforce in Portland* report found that ‘funding is not the key issue’, rather systemic issues that include:

- The sustainability of the health service is impacted by issues of staff shortages, culture, insufficient training and education opportunities and ineffective integration with regional services
- The current stand-alone specialist hospital model is flawed and does not achieve the level of healthcare required for the community
- Despite substantial medical staff expenditure, healthcare service provision and continuity of care are fragile, as demonstrated by substantial locum and short-term staffing appointments
- The current ad hoc collaboration by PDH with other neighbouring Victorian health services needs urgent refinement

Professor Matthews said: “The report clearly points out that the issues are structural and systemic and the ‘standalone specialist hospital model remains flawed’.

“PDH is currently an isolated specialist hospital, that isn’t effectively integrated into regional services, is staffed with resident medical officers, and has limited effective hospital/local general practitioner interaction.”

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Professor Hillis provided several recommendations:

- Effective regionalisation through establishing federated partnerships across the region is critical to improving health service delivery and supporting the medical workforce
- Alternative health workforces need to be seriously considered including working with medical clinical services or re-designing the workforce model to see medical staff at PDH becoming Rural Generalists, recruited to provide a range of clinical services both in the hospital as well as in general practice
- The enhanced role of Nurse Practitioners with the experience and authority to diagnose and treat people with a broad range of acute or chronic health conditions could be enhanced at Portland, particularly involving the Urgent Care Centre

Professor Matthews said the current PDH Board has endorsed the review with work underway to implement the recommendations.

“There is a lot of work to do and the report provides a pathway for action. We’re going to use these findings and recommendations to turn things around, so Portland residents and the broader community gets the care they need, where and when they need it.

“We’ve been clear that amalgamation is not on the table, but Professor Hillis has outlined numerous ways PDH can work more closely with nearby health services to combine expertise and make the best use of resources.”

“The Sustainable Medical Services at Portland District Health – steering committee, chaired by Rob Knowles, is now getting on with developing partnerships to support safer, more effective services in Portland and across the region.

“The Board and Executive of Portland District Health supported by the Department of Health and other key stakeholders are all working together to implement Professor Hillis’ recommendations – along with other reviews commissioned by the current board on culture, clinical governance and finance – and together we can get on with the long process of addressing the sustainability of the medical workforce in South West Victoria.”

Professor Matthews said the focus was on supporting the staff at PDH and delivering better health outcomes for the community.

“I look forward to coming together with staff to get on with the job of methodically addressing the issues PDH faces over the months and years ahead, supporting safe, quality healthcare in Portland and district into the future.

“This is something we all can get behind,” he said.

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