

Health System Demand in the North Coast

An overview

Identifying and addressing primary care access issues through a service planning approach.

MAY 2021

Overview

Healthy North Coast embarked on a Demand Management Strategy in late 2019, initially focused on the Mid North Coast (MNC) Local Health District (LHD). Subsequent data analysis has provided increasing insight into the complexities of whole of system demand across MNC and Northern NSW (NNSW).

This paper presents the rationale for the forthcoming conceptualisation, codesign and procurement processes in the next financial year. These interventions will address concerning increases in health system demand across the North Coast and put in place sustainable solutions that will have a lasting impact on health service quality and efficiency into the future.

Health system usage and other data shows concerning trends across the region. In particular, the data indicates that the ageing population is creating strong demand in primary care while younger generations are utilising low urgency care in hospital EDs at rates above the national average.

Given the extent of demand and the influence of population change in the next decade, incremental quality improvement and adjustment to the current service delivery paradigm in primary care, while needed and worthwhile, is unlikely to achieve the transformational change required to shift the health demand dynamic from reactive to proactive. Pioneering initiatives are needed that trial new models of care that have the potential to achieve financial viability after an initial period of funding.

The intended outcomes of the Demand Management Strategy are to shift the demand dynamic from reactive to proactive and:

- reduce low urgency ED presentations (triage 4 and 5 without admission) for targeted cohorts – young people and Aboriginal people
- increase primary care service utilisation by young people through new service delivery models that acknowledge and overcome current access barriers in primary care
- improve patient experience of coordination and care planning for patients over 65 in general practice.

Proposed models of care focus on younger people demand at ED; Aboriginal people (particularly in Kempsey); older person demand in general practice; and a review of clinical service coverage across the footprint.

Solutions are centred on co-designing and commissioning new models of care to:

- remove barriers to primary care for younger people, both in person and digitally
- increase the cultural safety of existing service delivery and address illnesses of the ear, nose and throat in young Aboriginal children
- increase capacity in general practice via multidisciplinary evidence-based interventions more closely aligned with the level of patient complexity and expected health outcomes.

New initiatives will be supported by a review of clinical service coverage for the region and the development of a multi-year plan with stakeholders to ensure adequate service delivery across the region.

Economic benefits

National health expenditure is growing at a faster rate than GDP, at 7% on average per annum¹. This growth is represented on the North Coast through a steady increase in both Emergency Department presentations and general practice attendances.

The Productivity Commission Shifting the Dial – 5 Year Productivity Review² demonstrated how delivering health services more efficiently and effectively is key to fostering a stronger economy. Shifting the Dial recommended a number of patient-centred and integrated care initiatives that are closely aligned with Healthy North Coast’s Demand Management project areas of focus.

The recommendations included:

- Freeing up innovators through regional commissioning approaches.
- Disseminating best practice and supporting high value care.
- Implementing patient-centred approaches to care, through patient reported experience and outcome measures and other approaches.
- Improving the efficiency of the broader health system through formal collaborations between LHNs and PHNs.

The impact of delivering these reforms was modelled by the Productivity Commission to reduce demand for health services through improved population health outcomes. A healthier population means that people are able to work and support home-based productivity and leisure. The benefit of implementing these initiatives was modelled by the Productivity Commission to drive significant economic returns.

The Shifting the Dial recommendations strongly align with the priorities identified for the Demand Management Strategy. Investment into these types of initiatives will generate an estimated return on investment of 3.05, leading to significant financial benefits to the health system within the year of implementation. Conversely, the opportunity cost of not doing so is the loss of benefits.

The Shifting the Dial review demonstrates how cumulative investment into innovation, best practice and coordinated care generates optimum returns over twenty years of sustained investment.

Contact:

Julie Sturgess
Chief Executive Officer
jsturgess@hnc.org.au

¹ Productivity Commission (2017), *Shifting the Dial – 5 Year Productivity Review*. Retrieved from: www.pc.gov.au.

² Ibid.