

Media release

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New exercise program targets chronic conditions in Tasmania's north west

North west Tasmanians living with chronic health conditions now have access to a free, strength-based exercise program designed to boost their quality of life.

The Exercise Treatment Program is a 14-week course designed to improve activity levels of older people who have a long-term health condition, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, depression and more.

The Australian Government has committed \$500,000 in funding for the north west program up to June 2022.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) announced today an open tender process had resulted in Tasmanian-based workplace health organisation Healthy Business Performance Group (HBP Group) being selected to deliver the program.

The group exercise program targets people living in north west Tasmania who have – or are at risk of developing – a chronic health condition, and are:

- aged 60 or older, or
- an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person aged 45 or older.

Research shows Tasmania's north west has a higher proportion of people aged 65 and over, compared to the state as a whole, Primary Health Tasmania spokesperson Joyleene Abrey said.

"The north west also has higher rates of self-reported chronic conditions – things like arthritis, diabetes and osteoporosis – compared to the state average," Ms Abrey said.

"That's why we're hoping this new program will be the hands-on, accessible support that locals in the north west need to build their strength and, ideally, stop a deterioration in their health and wellbeing in its early stages."

As part of the Exercise Treatment Program, eligible participants will be guided through individually tailored exercises at weekly sessions, as well as have access to healthy living advice in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

The education sessions – covering topics such as how to prevent falls, tackling sedentary habits and staying motivated to pursue your goals – will be delivered in an informal manner, with simple 'take home' messages.

The Federal Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians, Senator Richard Colbeck, said the program would empower north west Tasmanians to learn more about how to stay healthy and well in older age, even if they are living with a chronic condition.

"Undoubtedly, a chronic health condition diagnosis can change someone's life – but it doesn't have to mean a good quality of life is permanently off the table," he said.

"This free program will give north west Tasmanians living with chronic health conditions the support they need, so they can attain the best quality of life possible."

HBP Group CEO Allan Dickins said the provider would build on existing, productive relationships with a range of local businesses across the north west to deliver the Exercise Treatment Program in participants' local communities.

He said participants start the program by undergoing an individual assessment in their first week, designed to help determine their general health, program goals, and functional capacity.

"No two people share the same experience of living with a chronic health condition, even if their referral lists the same diagnosis," Mr Dickins said.

"This program recognises that and makes sure the exercises and educational sessions are tailored to an individual's specific health needs and goals."

He said participants are assessed again at the end of the program to measure improvement, review their goals and achievements, and give them ideas for how to keep active and healthy moving forward.

The Exercise Treatment Program is now open for referrals through a GP or other healthcare provider, with the first group program expected to commence by mid-April.

It is available across the following local government areas: Burnie, Central Coast, Circular Head, Devonport, Kentish, King Island, Latrobe, Waratah-Wynyard and West Coast.

Primary Health Tasmania (Tasmania PHN) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation working to connect care and keep Tasmanians well and out of hospital. It was established under the Australian Government's Primary Health Networks Program to support and enable a coordinated, primary care-focused health system.

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