

Tasman expo builds youth awareness of health services

Ever heard the proverb “It takes a village to raise a child”?

This could be seen in action in March, when the Tasman District High School and the local Neighborhood House hosted the Tasman Youth Health Expo.

The expo provided young people and their families in the region with place-based and person-centred information to meet the unique needs of the community.

The event formed part of an ongoing process between the Tasman community plus Primary Health Tasmania, Health Consumers Tasmania and the Tasmanian Health Service to identify local health and wellbeing challenges and opportunities.

One of the priorities identified through this collaborative process focused on improving access to services for young people. This led to the idea of the expo to raise awareness of health and wellbeing services available nearby and further afield, and to foster help-seeking behaviour.



Rubee Dano and Adele Daly of the Royal Flying Doctor Service at their expo stall

The Royal Flying Doctor Service Tasmania, the Link Youth Health Service, Tasman District School and Health Consumers Tasmania took the lead on organising the event, which saw several service provider organisations attend two sessions – first at the Tasman District School for students, and then at the Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House for parents, carers and other community members.

At the school, students participated in activities such as ‘service speed dates’ where they could learn about health-related topics such as mental

health, drug and alcohol use, sexual health, different ways they can access services, and quick tips on navigating health appointments.

Other activities included a drumming circle, netball tournament and colouring competition for junior students.

The expo then showcased service providers to students, displaying their service offerings with their stalls, activities, and a photo booth to engage high school students.

School principal Susan Flinn said showcasing a broad range of services was critical to equip

young Tasman community members with the information they need to seek help, and in improving their health literacy.

“We need to fill that gap and actively engage with them about what options are available to them,” Susan said.

School nurse Kaitlyn Whitelaw highlighted the difficulty students can face in accessing appropriate care.

“The types of health issues that I see are varied, and some are beyond the local service capacity... I want to increase students’ awareness of some of the services available, especially for those who travel into town for their college years,” she said.

Kaitlyn added that students often travel outside of the region for their medical care, but their autonomy to access services can be limited by their parents’ or carers’ ability to transport them.

“There is a bus, but it leaves at 6.30am and returns around 6.30pm, so young people are looking at a 12-hour trip if they’d like to access some of the services in town,” she said.

The time needed to travel is also likely to further impact their social determinants of health, including their finances, education, and ability to engage with services that address their individual needs.

Debra Mill from Health Consumers Tasmania said managing complex systemic challenges that expand beyond health services to transport services and infrastructure require whole-of-community solutions, transcending existing silos.

“Real change in communities can be achieved when we genuinely undertake co-design projects which empower and develop community capacity over time,” she said.

The expo was just one step in building this community capacity, with information about services available locally, by phone and online potentially reducing the need for travel in some cases.

One group of high school students said the expo had introduced them to new service options they can access and expanded their knowledge about some of the service options available, such as walk-in appointments at The Link.

“I feel like my friends wouldn’t tell their parents some stuff, but if they told me – I know more about where they could get help now.” ■

Working with the Tasman community

People living in rural and remote areas often face additional barriers to effective health care.

Some factors that contribute to poor health outcomes include limited access to health services; a higher prevalence of health risks associated with socioeconomic status; and environmental conditions.

Primary Health Tasmania, the Tasmanian Health Service and Health Consumers Tasmania have been working with community members and service providers in the Tasman local government area to better understand current health and wellbeing needs and the services available. They have then worked together to come up with ways to address immediate, medium, and long-term needs and challenges.

Developing solutions with the local community and tailoring them to the local area gives them the best chance of success in the long term.

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