

New equipment getting Tasman residents on their feet

A new piece of specialist medical equipment is helping members of the Tasman community get back on their feet, without having to leave the area.

Funded by the Tasmanian Department of Health, the new podiatry chair at the Tasman Multi-Purpose Service in Nubeena means local residents can now access a range of services and treatments they would have previously had to travel to Hobart or Sorell to receive.

This initiative is part of an ongoing process between the Tasman community plus Primary Health Tasmania, Health Consumers Tasmania and the Tasmanian Health Service to identify and address local health and wellbeing needs, challenges and opportunities.

Through a consultation process driven by Primary Health Tasmania, one of the needs identified by both local healthcare providers and community members was a podiatry service, with the associated infrastructure and human resources.

With the new chair in place, a visiting podiatrist is now able to provide services to locals two days per month. Community nurses use the versatile piece of equipment three days per week for a range of clinical purposes, from giving injections to taking blood.



Leanne Triffitt and Shirley

The Tasmanian Health Service and the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group were key in actioning this identified need to improve access to services tailored around chronic condition management.

Huon Regional Care Tasman facility manager Leeanne Triffitt says the addition of the podiatry chair has already made a huge difference.

"It's great for both patients and staff - it's much more comfortable, and has made the space more professional," she says.

"We're getting other work done too. Along with the podiatry chair we've got a new dressing trolley, and are getting a nice new floor and some new paint.

"It's going to look like a much more professional clinical space, with the podiatry chair at the centre."

Leeanne is also a member of the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group, made up of local service providers who are working to support the implementation of initiatives and activities designed to meet the community needs identified.

Leeanne says as well as listening to suggestions from local primary healthcare providers, the clinical group works closely with community group Tasman Voice for Health, which played an important role in securing the podiatry chair.

"They're a really good source of information for me about what the community needs," Leeanne says.

"They're also a really good support for me in getting the word out about what we can deliver, so that services are being accessed – people can't use these services if they don't know about them.

"The Tasman and Forrester peninsulas only have about 3000 permanent residents, but they're spread over a large area and a lot of people are very isolated. Getting the information out to them is really hard.

"For people who like being isolated, going to Hobart can be intimidating but coming into this little service can be much more inviting, I hope."

Tasman Medical Practice manager Maree Walker has already seen first-hand the impact that having access to a podiatry service can have on the local community.

Maree says the podiatry service was desperately needed in the area and has been extremely popular with residents.

"We found a podiatrist, Lucy Willoughby, who comes all the way from Launceston two days a month, and those days are solidly booked," she says.

"It saves patients having to go into Sorell or somewhere else.

"Our fear is always 'will the community take up the service?', because there is a small out-of-pocket fee.

"But it has been welcomed with open arms, which is fantastic.

It certainly keeps Lucy busy for those two days a month."

Maree says securing a podiatry service and equipment for the Tasman community was "a big priority" for local residents, many of whom are unable or reluctant to travel for treatment.

"With the price of fuel and the cost of living, people have less money in their pocket now," she says.

"They can come here to do everything all on the one day - see their doctor, get a referral, and see a podiatrist. We want to make it a one-stop shop really.

"We aim to offer as many services as we can - we have an audiologist who comes down once a month, a psychologist who comes in, a geriatrician.

"We want to work together to build these services up so people don't have to go off the peninsula if they don't want to.

"The podiatrist and the chair are real big-ticket items that help the community, and that's what it's all about."

Primary Health Tasmania's Martina Wyss agrees.

"Population health planning' might not be a phrase that gets a lot of people excited, but when it has results like this, everyone's smiling," she says.

"This is a great example of people coming together to listen, learn, plan, and then act.

"For a relatively small investment, together we are making a big difference for a lot of people in this rural community." ■

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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