

# Community-led action for better health

**Efforts to understand and address the health and wellbeing needs of Tasman residents have been led by the community itself in the form of two grassroots groups: the Tasman Voice for Health and the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group.**

The two groups use their expertise and knowledge – either as local residents or health professionals – to address difficulties Tasman community members face in accessing health services in the area.

This is all part of ongoing work supported by Primary Health Tasmania, the Tasmanian Health Service and Health Consumers Tasmania.

Priorities identified during a community consultation process were allocated to each group based on whether they were deemed to have a predominately clinical or consumer focus.

The groups can collectively agree on, implement or advocate for activities such as the purchase of a life-saving iSTAT machine (which the Clinical Services Action Group identified as a priority) and the Tasman Connect Health and Wellbeing directory (implemented by the Tasman Voice for Health), confident that they are progressing priorities endorsed by the local community.



*Members of the Tasman Voice for Health*

Undertaking community consultation and then empowering action groups in this way allows for sustainable, place-based solutions which are tailored to the needs of the local population.

Mary Downie is chair of the Tasman Voice for Health, and says the group's role is to listen to what the community wants.

"We have members from all areas of our community, so they can be the 'ears on the ground' and advocate for their own area," she says.

"We have committee members who are part of other community groups like Rotary.

"Rotary runs programs within the school and the school links in with the Neighbourhood House, so you can see that the links of committee members expand the Tasman Voice for Health's ability to reach into the community and get information in and out."

Following on from the initial community consultation, Tasman Voice for Health members continue to engage the community.

"We've done promotional activities at events like the Koonyo Garlic Festival, and have met with local service providers like the pharmacy, the Multi-Purpose Service and the doctors' surgery," Mary says.

To more effectively deliver important information to the community about available health and wellbeing services and community activities, the Tasman Voice for Health has developed a web-based directory, which Mary says "has had quite a profound effect already of connecting people in our community".

The Tasman Voice for Health's other major achievement to date involved facilitating two mental health first aid training programs, with 30 community members completing the courses.



*Millicent Borowicz*

Mary says the Tasman Voice for Health has enjoyed immediate success thanks to the funding, training and support it has received.

She says supporting community-driven projects with funding makes volunteer community groups like the Tasman Voice for Health feel they've been listened to: "That makes the volunteers feel that they're valued, and keeps the Tasman Voice for Health motivated."

In her role as a pharmacist at the busy Tasman Pharmacy, Millicent Borowicz engages with a broad cross-section of the local community every day, giving her rare insight into what people in the area want and need.

Now she's a member of the Tasman Clinical Services Action Group, Millicent is perfectly placed to take that community feedback on board and share locals' concerns and suggestions with the group.

"At the pharmacy we get a lot of feedback about what's going on, and how easy it is for people to access healthcare services," she says.

"It's a really good way to identify gaps and work out what we need in the community.

"I'll definitely be bringing ideas I hear from patients to the Clinical Services Action Group, and seeing if there's anything we can do to help people in the community further."

Millicent quickly saw the impact the group can have for the local community through targeted campaigns like Women's Health Week.

"The Clinical Services Action Group is a good way to catch up with other health professionals in the area and talk about how we can be more collaborative, because we're all seeing the same patients in the same community," Millicent says.

"It's really beneficial for us to know what services other people have to offer, where we can point patients when they need help or have questions about certain things.

"We're in a special spot down here. We have different needs than other parts of the state, and we don't have access to services as easily as people who can quickly drive into the city.

"I think asking locals what they need and what they would like to see is super-important for the 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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