20 September 2016

Pharmacy Review (MDP 900)
Department of Health
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Canberra ACT 2601
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Dear Review Secretariat

The Western NSW Primary Health Network (WNSW PHN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation Review Panel.

The area covered by the WNSW PHN encompasses every population centre from small cities to very remote locations and features big distances, sometimes inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to health care. Chronic disease and high Aboriginal needs feature prominently.

Across the region there are exceptionally high levels of health risk behaviours including smoking, poor nutrition, risky alcohol consumption and inadequate physical activity. The high prevalence of chronic disease in the region reflects the prevalence of health risk behaviours and is a contributing factor to high hospitalisation rates. More than 35% of the population are overweight and a further 32% are obese. Around half of all GP consultations are related to a chronic disease, and multiple chronic diseases are addressed in around 1 in 10 GP consultations. These rates and associated hospitalisations pose a significant threat to sustainability within the health system and will be best addressed through collaborative and integrated approaches.

One priority area identified by the WNSW PHN Far West Community Council is Equity of Access, the issues identified in this area included the vast geography and sparse population being a challenge in health care delivery. Therefore, health consumers in far west NSW cannot consistently access the health services they need in a timely and convenient manner. This results in the poor health status for far west, having the lowest life expectancy and premature mortality rates from cancer and cardiovascular disease and the highest rate of potentially avoidable deaths under 75 years of age of all NSW Local Health Districts.

The potential contributors for the poorer health status as identified by the WNSW PHN Far West Community Council includes; barriers to accessing health services, including time and distance, access to transport and travel costs; outreach visits too infrequent for early detection through screening, treatment and service costs are a barrier for low socio economic health consumers, lengthy waiting times to access services impacts on early detection, intervention or treatment efficacy, not all consumers are engaged in primary health care, and that health staff need to speak on level ground for community to feel comfortable.
Challenges of distance are apparent when trying to attract health professionals to our region. We support funding of current programs to support travel for Continuing Professional Development and student programs currently in place through the University Department of Rural Health. Student placements through the UDRH program then support of intern employment with rural placement incentives have been very successful in leading to eventual employment of qualified pharmacists in Broken Hill.

We support a system of indexing remoteness to allow additional funding to better support Pharmacy in rural communities as we note that there are increased costs associated with provision of these services due to distance, remoteness and difficulties attracting appropriate staff. Having economically viable Pharmacies support the healthcare system as a whole. Access to a qualified health professional, available without the need for an appointment is of significant advantage to a patient's health needs. This is of particular importance in areas already under staffed by health professionals which is indicative of much of Western NSW.

Despite the challenges in Western NSW we are in a unique position with an opportunity for increased collaboration between primary and secondary healthcare service providers. We would welcome increased opportunity for roles where a pharmacist is also involved with other health providers such as shared community/hospital pharmacist positions, pharmacists working in GP surgeries, as part of an Aboriginal health service, and as part of teams of health professionals that visit smaller communities. At the moment funding is limited for such roles.

Telehealth and information technology has been identified as a way of addressing some of the challenges to healthcare provision in our region. There is obvious potential for someone to be able to access their pharmacist more with infrastructure support.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Pharmacy Remuneration and Regulation Review and hope the review will result in equity of access and high quality and appropriate care for health consumers in far western NSW.

If you have any queries regarding this submission please do not hesitate to contact Michele Pitt, Far West Councils and Integrated Care Manager on 08 8005 8361, email: michele.pitt@wnswphn.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Harvey
Chief Executive Officer