

MEDIA RELEASE



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More cancer staff crucial for new health plan

The Cancer Council says Future Health is a bold step in the right direction for the state's cancer services but falls down on some of the detail.

The state's leading independent cancer organisation has written to the Minister with a number of its concerns and to recommend measures that will ensure the best outcome for cancer patients, their families and the medicos who treat them.

The Cancer Council Tasmania CEO Lawson Ride says the new plan tackles a number of urgent cancer issues, but fails to adequately address some crucial areas.

"Today many cancer workforce and service delivery inequalities still remain in Tasmania," Mr Ride says.

"For instance, it's been over six years since Northern Tasmania has had an adequate medical oncology workforce with clinicians based in Launceston, Latrobe and Burnie. It's important that haematology and oncology services are sustainable and inline with Medical Workforce Advisory Committee recommendations," he says.

Mr Ride says there is an urgent need to come up with a realistic process to help cancer patients and their families meet expensive travel and accommodation costs associated with their illness.

"We must urgently set up appropriate partnerships and funding models to rationalise and consolidate transport and accommodation resources," he says.

Mr Ride says the Cancer Council also wants government to commit to funding a number of care coordinator positions to work with patients and the clinical team.

"These nurses would work alongside the medical team to coordinate treatment, access support services and get timely information for patients," he says.

"The government must also recognise the equal priority of psychosocial care in cancer treatment and provide psychosocial care to all those affected by cancer, particularly those in regional and remote Tasmania."

Mr Ride says the Cancer Council is worried that the state budget's lack of investment in preventative health will undermine the success of the health plan.

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“More than 3400 Tasmanian lives were lost to tobacco between 1995 and 2001, and the cost of smoking to the Tasmanian economy is around \$450 million each year,” he says.

“Smoking is the single biggest cost driver in the Tasmanian health system and causes about 30% of all preventable chronic disease. Despite this, we don’t spend anywhere near enough to drive down smoking rates to a level that will allow long term cost savings.

“As a result we have increasing adult smoking rates and spiraling demand for treatment of people with smoking-related respiratory, kidney and heart diseases, cancer, stroke and diabetes.

“Given that 60% of acute admissions to hospital are smokers and hospitals are already flat out, we urgently need a funding injection to break this tragic cycle.”

The Tasmania Together Benchmark calls for a reduction in the smoking rate to 15% by 2010.

“With recent figures showing that 27.5%* of Tasmanian men and 23.5%* of women smoke, we’re already four per cent behind the 2005 Tasmania Together target ... and steadily losing ground,” he says.

For comment please call Lawson Ride on 0418 129 757

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*ABS National Health stats