

MEDIA RELEASE – Latrobe Health Advocate releases progress reports

October 31, 2022



Media release of Latrobe Health Advocate

Latrobe Health Advocate Jane Anderson has released a report highlighting the changes that have been implemented to improve local **end-of-life palliative care services** and an updated action plan to **improve access to primary healthcare services in the region**.

In September 2019 the Advocate released a report, ***Achieving Victoria's best end-of-life experience for people in Latrobe***, which included five areas for reform and twelve recommendations for action. In the past year, there has been substantial progress made in several areas for action

The Advocate is now committed to ensuring the challenges identified in this progress update are addressed and encourages the Victorian Government to consider how the recommendations of this work can be implemented to achieve the best end-of-life experience for people in Latrobe.

Service system leaders, palliative care specialists and local communities have demonstrated their readiness for the establishment of a dedicated facility in Latrobe, enabling a greater place of choice.

There are significant constraints within the public health system including a limited number (4) of funded inpatient palliative care beds within the hospital setting. Local services are reporting an increase in demand for end-of-life palliative care and have stated that the existing beds do not meet the current demand. Work needs to occur to undertake a thorough assessment of the local system's capacity to meet current and future demands for inpatient palliative care

Further consideration should also be given to how contemporary governance brings health services and communities together to share their collective expertise. This could be modelled on some of the emerging work occurring within Victoria as part of the mental health system reform

As part of her **2021-22 Statement of Intent**, the Advocate reaffirmed her commitment to the Victorian Minister for Health and communities across Latrobe to continue to address the systemic underlying issues that impact how people in the region access GPs. This has been a priority for her office since 2019 in response to the voices of Latrobe communities, GPs and health services who have reached out to her to express their concerns and detail their challenges.

In September 2020 the Advocate released ***Improving Access to Services in Latrobe***, a collaborative action plan that demonstrates a shared commitment to improving access to GPs. Actions within the plan were drafted and reviewed by a wide range of key stakeholders and coordinating agencies who remain committed to improving access to primary healthcare services in Latrobe.

The Advocate released a progress report in September 2021 which acknowledged the actions that had been taken to improve training pathways for doctors, build digital literacy, promote the liveability of Latrobe, and enable local system design and innovation to reduce the burden on the emergency department. She added

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"I identified at that time that there was scope for more organisations to join the conversation and an opportunity to harness the strength and capacity within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone and of the Latrobe Health Assembly to influence a move towards a model of prevention rather than cure."

"Action plan stakeholders have worked independently and together to raise awareness of community needs and deliver on their commitments, and the revised action plan has been created based on community views and partner agency feedback to ensure it remains relevant, accurate and future-focused".

A recent survey of Latrobe communities shows that making an appointment to see a GP remains difficult in the Latrobe Valley, with patients having to wait for up to four weeks. Community members have reported that when they are unable to access a doctor for themselves or someone they care for, they commonly try the emergency department, Nurse on Call or a local pharmacy.

When asked about ways to reduce the demand for local doctors, community members have suggested a reduction in smoking, healthy eating, exercise, improvements to local transport infrastructure, preventative health checks, increased use of nurse practitioners and telehealth, as well as attracting more medical practitioners to the region.

Quotes attributable to Latrobe Health Advocate Jane Anderson:

"I want to acknowledge the efforts of local services and palliative care workers who have demonstrated their commitment to working together to respond to the aspirations of people in Latrobe."

"I have no doubt that with the continued support of the Victorian Government, people in Latrobe and the broader Gippsland region will be able to experience a consistently high standard of end-of-life care that is on par with what they deserve and is offered in places of their choice."

"In the year ahead, my office will continue to seek opportunities to work with local Aboriginal organisations and communities to learn more about person-centred models of care. There is also a need to support the education and health sectors to promote the primary and secondary school offerings in Gippsland for GPs' children and families. I am particularly enthused by the opportunity for local stakeholders to work together to implement the Priority Primary Care Centre and Urgent Care Clinics in Latrobe in a way that complements and integrates with existing services. "

"I am encouraged by the increased level of strategic alignment and cooperation that is occurring between State and Commonwealth-funded initiatives. I understand that it will take some time for local communities to experience a notable change in the ways they access healthcare, however, I remain confident that the conditions exist to bring about sustained reform that will ultimately improve population health outcomes in the Latrobe Valley."

To view, the full progress reports [Palliative care - progress report](#) & [Improving access to services in Latrobe 2022](#)

For more information or to arrange an interview with the Advocate please contact Kylie Julin from the Latrobe Health Advocate office at 1800 319 255 or info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au