

# Rural health news

Issue 17, December 2007

## A message from the Director

Welcome to the final edition of Rural health news for 2007. After a busy year, I'm sure we are all looking forward to some time off and celebrating the festive season with family and friends.

A lot has occurred in rural health this year. Several major health and aged care redevelopment projects were completed, including the \$20 million Andrew Love Cancer Treatment Centre at Barwon Health.

In August, Minister Andrews released Rural directions 2007, a discussion paper outlining the roles, relationships and development priorities for rural health services going forward.

Work was also commenced on the Rural Collaborative Practice Model Pilot which pilots a new practice model of care into a selection of rural hospitals to deliver sustainable and safe emergency care in rural Victoria.

As in previous years, workforce has been a key priority. A range of workforce initiatives were progressed including the development of an innovative intern placement model combining Small Rural Health Services (SRHSs) and rural procedural general practice.

Looking ahead, 2008 will be another busy year, with the Australian Health Care Agreement due for review and health being high on the agenda of all Australian governments, State and Federal.

I look forward to working with you to improve health service delivery in rural Victoria.

Have a safe and happy New Year.

Maree Guyatt  
Director  
Rural and Regional Health Services Branch

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Rural Health Conference 2008

The **2008 Rural Health Conference** on chronic disease will be held in **Bendigo** from **Wednesday 30 April to Friday 2 May**.

Please put these dates in your diary and visit [www.ruralhealth2008.com.au](http://www.ruralhealth2008.com.au) to register your interest.

## 2008 Rural Health Board Appointments

The 2008 rural health board appointments process will commence in late January. More information including timelines will be provided to agencies and available from [www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/) shortly.

## RURAL AND REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES BRANCH (RRHSB) NEWS

### New Faces in RRHSB

**Tim Austin** joined RRHSB in October 2007 as a graduate recruit in the Budget Management and Reporting Unit.

### People Leaving RRHSB

**Geoff Lavender** left his position of Director, RRHSB in October 2007 to take up the position of Director of Programs in Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division.

**John Burch** resigned from his position of Manager, Operations in October 2007.

**Regina Kalb** has taken an 18-month secondment as Senior Policy Advisor (Workforce) in the Policy and Workforce Strategy Unit of DHS's Mental Health Branch.

**Jamie Lynch**, a management trainee under the Rural Management Residency Program (RMRP), will be finishing his 6-month placement in the Policy Projects Unit at the end of December.

### The 14th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum

The 14th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum on "Aged Care - Caring for older people in rural Victoria" was held on Friday 23 November at Lindenwarrah in Milawa. Over 145 delegates participated in the forum.

Presenters included:

- **Anna Howe**, consultant and gerontologist: *An analysis of the older population in rural areas*
- **Ronda Held**, CEO Uniting Care Community Options: *The challenge of delivering community care*

- **Merle Mitchell**, Chairperson, Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians: *What older people expect and want*”.



John Richards receives his award from DHS Secretary, Fran Thorn.

Workshop sessions focussed on rural aged care issues including workforce; the built environment in residential aged care services; planning for community care needs; and focusing on what older people can do, not what they can't.

In addition, DHS Secretary Fran Thorn presented John Richards with a Certificate of Appreciation acknowledging his valuable contribution to rural health and aged care in Victoria.

Presentations from the forum are available to download from:

<http://n036.csv.au/net/health/ruralhealth/news/forums.htm>

### **Rural Benchmarking Project**

In late 2006, RRHSB initiated the Rural Benchmarking Project with the Group C health services, two Group Bs and two Small Rural Health Services. The key objectives of the project were to:

- define an agreed set of financial and performance governance indicators for rural and regional health service boards that will enable benchmarking across health services; and
- design and implement a centralised system for data capture, validation and reporting to the sector against the governance indicators using existing data sources where relevant.

An initial workshop for health service board chairs and CEOs was held in February 2007. Workshop participants agreed that a set of governance indicators for benchmarking purposes should be developed, and that a

benchmarking tool should be developed and implemented. A Steering Committee comprising DHS and health services representatives was formed to oversee the project.

In October, the Steering Committee reached consensus on a set of 35 proposed governance indicators that could be used to benchmark health services across a range of perspectives including workforce, service delivery, patient safety and satisfaction, finance and service improvement and sustainability.

The Committee also discussed a range of possibilities for presenting the benchmark indicators including a one-page snapshot and a more detailed interactive tool that would compare both individual agency performance against all other participating health services at a point in time, and trend in performance versus the group average over a period of time.

A second workshop was held in December 2007 to report back on the agreed set of governance indicators, the proposed format for presentation, and the proposal to move the project into the implementation phase through developing and implementing the benchmarking tool. The indicators were prioritised further to 17 key governance indicators for boards and CEOs to use when benchmarking against other health services.

The Steering Committee will meet again in January 2008 to finalise the set of governance indicators.

### **Increase in Victorian Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (VPTAS)**

VPTAS provides financial assistance to rural Victorians who are required to travel 100 km or more to receive specialist medical treatment.

On 12 October, Health Minister Daniel Andrews announced an increase in VPTAS subsidies. The new rates came into effect from 1 October, whereby the reimbursement rate for private car travel increased from 14 to 17 cents per kilometre and the accommodation subsidy increased from \$30 to \$35 per night for patients and eligible escorts.

As part of an ongoing quality improvement process, the department is currently reviewing the VPTAS policy and claims processing arrangements to maximise the consistency and efficiency of the program.

VPTAS claim forms are available from DHS regional offices, most doctors' surgeries, large rural hospitals, metropolitan hospitals and social work departments within health services.

VPTAS claim forms, policy guidelines and travel diaries can also be downloaded from:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/aseservices/>

The Department is also currently piloting a scheme to increase access to VPTAS assistance for Koori patients receiving specialist treatment in the following hospitals:

- Mercy Hospital for Women
- Royal Children's Hospital
- Monash Medical Centre
- St Vincent's Hospital.

Further information about the Koori VPTAS pilot is available from Raelene Lesniowska on (03) 9096 2005.

### **Visiting Medical Officer Audit Project**

Rural and Regional Health Services Branch is currently in the process of engaging independent consultants to undertake the Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) Audit Project. The project, which is due to commence in early 2008, will involve audits of the business systems, processes and internal controls currently operating at Victorian rural public hospitals for processing payments made to contracted fee-for-service VMOs. As indicated in the Policy and Funding Guidelines, each of the 71 rural health services will be audited at least once during 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Key objectives of the project are to:

- Report on the current systems utilised by rural and regional health services to manage and process fee-for-service VMO payments.
- Assess the adequacy of internal business controls and practices for the accurate assessment, validation and processing of fee-for-service VMO claims within rural and regional health services.
- Establish an evidence base for developing best practice procedures for processing, monitoring and validating fee-for-service VMO claims within rural and regional health services.

A project reference group, comprising representatives from the Department and rural health services will oversee the project. For further information regarding this project, contact Pam Sheers on 9096 1525 or email [pam.sheers@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:pam.sheers@dhs.vic.gov.au)

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## **DHS NEWS**

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### **Climate Change and Health Discussion Paper**

In October 2007, DHS' Environmental Health Unit launched a discussion paper entitled *Climate change and health: An exploration of the challenges for public health in Victoria*.

The document, which was launched at the Department's Climate Change and Human Health Conference, aims to reflect from the current literature a brief overview of the potential health impacts of climate change and to relate this to Australia, and where possible, Victoria, providing local examples.

The discussion paper can be downloaded from: [Climate change: Environmental Health - Victorian Government Health Information, Australia](#)

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## **OTHER NEWS**

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### **Charter of Human Rights: The Next Phase**

Health services are reminded that the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 came into operation on 1 January 2007. The Charter seeks to promote and protect twenty well-known civil and political rights that are already an established part of our democratic society.

From 1st January 2008, public authorities will have legal obligations under the Charter. The Charter makes it unlawful for a public authority to act in a way that is incompatible with a human right or to fail to give proper consideration to relevant human rights when making a decision. The definition of public authorities includes entities established by statute that have functions of a public nature, such as public hospitals, public health services and multi-purpose services.

The Charter is an important piece of legislation for public healthcare agencies to understand, as many of the human rights contained in the Charter are relevant to the delivery of healthcare services, including the right to life; the right not to have your privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with; the right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; the right to freedom of expression; and the right to liberty and security.

DHS has conducted numerous general training sessions for the funded sector in rural areas over

the past few months, and targeted training sessions for regional and rural public healthcare agencies were run in October and November in Traralgon, Bendigo and Colac.

The materials distributed at the public hospital training sessions are available to hospital staff by emailing [anne.mullins@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:anne.mullins@dhs.vic.gov.au)

A copy of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 can be obtained from the Victorian Legislation website at <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>

Further information can also be found at:

<http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/>

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au> - Human Rights Charter

**Please send your feedback and suggestions for future editions of Rural health news to:**

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