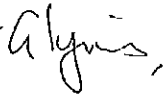


Ms Glynis Flower
Executive Officer
Hobart Women's Health Centre
25 Lefroy Street
NORTH HOBART 7002

Dear Ms Flower



Thank you for the opportunity to provide Labor's comments on women's health issues.

A gendered approach to Women's Health policy

Labor believes women have the right to participate in society fully and without discrimination. Labor recognises that while the average life expectancy of Australian women continues to rise, there are still health inequalities between different groups of Australian women. Also, while Australian women have a higher life expectancy than men, there are gender related differences in health outcomes. A gendered approach to women's health policy – such as the National Women's Health Policy being developed by the Australian Government - is clearly a key step in improving women's health and wellbeing. Labor has ensured that Tasmania is represented on the National Women's Health Development Working Group, which was established to oversee the policy development.

Continued investment in women's health

Labor is strongly committed to continued investment in women's health and recognises the important contribution of the Hobart Women's Health Centre to women's health promotion and prevention in Tasmania. Labor has delivered record investment in health services in Tasmania, through Tasmania's Health Plan. That investment includes important areas of women's health such as Breastscreen; women's and children's services in our public hospitals; sexual health services; and women's health policy development through the Department of Health and Human Services' Population Health Unit.

Labor will continue to fund the Hobart Women's Health Centre, and to work in partnership with the Centre in taking on new areas such as the Women's Health Information Line for which additional ongoing funding has been provided.

Barriers to women's participation in employment, housing, education and training and health and wellbeing

Labor recognises that barriers to women's full participation in the workforce and in economic life must be removed, including lack of child care, unequal access to employment, education and training, infrastructure and support services, and inadequate retirement income.

We are committed to ensuring women's access to education, training and employment programs to facilitate their labour force re-entry, and to increased opportunities for economic participation through self-employment. We believe this objective must be achieved by consultation with women, especially those who may be relatively socially or economically marginalised or disenfranchised within the community, to ensure they have a voice and have the choice to participate in the decision-making process.

Labor has delivered full time funding for Neighbourhood Houses around Tasmania, as one practical way to assist socially or economically marginalised women to learn new skills and access wider support services within their local communities. In January 2010, Labor announced a \$20,000 grant for Unions Tasmania to undertake a research project to better understand women's participation in the workforce in Tasmania. The results of this research will help develop further policy and practical responses to women's particular issues in workforce participation.

Labor will maintain a policy focus on women's health, ensuring that adequate breast screening and cervical cancer screening services are available; that women have access to appropriate family planning services, and to excellent pre-natal, birthing, neo-natal and post natal services.

An ageing population

A particular focus for Labor is to ensure that women and children are provided with appropriate, secure and affordable housing, for example by supporting the growth of the co-operative and co-housing sector to better meet the needs of women, and in particular women with disabilities and senior women.

Competing demands

In 2007, Labor delivered Tasmania's Health Plan, as a key strategy to address this issue in the immediate and longer term.

Labor recognised that Tasmania's health system faces major challenges: a dramatic increase in chronic disease; an ageing population; and increasing costs of healthcare particularly in the hospital sector.

Tasmania's Health Plan is all about making sure we have a sustainable and efficient health system that provides all Tasmanians with the care they need, when they need it.

A major focus of the Plan is the integration of services to put the client at the centre – so that people experience seamless care when they move between facilities (e.g. hospitals and community health centres) and health care professionals (e.g. GPs, nurses and specialists).

The Plan also emphasises health and wellbeing, not just illness, and ways to encourage and help people to take control of their own health.

Some practical examples of how the Plan is being put in to effect include the restructuring of health service delivery in to Area Health Services – bringing together primary health, community health, acute care and health promotion/prevention services; and the network of Integrated Care Centres being developed across the State – which will be of great benefit particularly to people with chronic disease, by enabling them to access health support services close to home and reduce the need for hospital admissions.

Facilities for women in mental health facilities and gynaecology units

Labor strongly supports separate facilities for women in gynaecology units and this principle is maintained in our public hospitals.

On 30 June 2008, the Royal Hobart Hospital completed the relocation and refurbishment of the specialist gynaecological and co-located Women's Health Service.

The 10 bed women's health service is being run as a women's precinct with solely female patients accommodated there. This is located within the larger general surgical unit.

The co-location of gynaecology and general surgery has provided a strengthened focus on women's health issues to ensure Tasmanian women experiencing other types of sensitive surgery, not just gynaecological surgery, can be cared for in one dedicated precinct.

The unit is fully functional and operates at capacity most of the time providing excellent patient care for the women accommodated there.

The nursing team have facilitated gynaecology study days to assist in further education of the general nurses working in this area.

Hospital policy states that *"The 10 bed Gynaecology and Women's Health Unit is to remain a women's precinct and the beds managed as such with women only accommodated within these beds. Under no circumstances are male patients to be admitted to the Gynaecology and Women's Health Unit"*.

Currently in Tasmania all Government funded mental health facilities and nearly all non government mental health facilities are mixed gender. This approach is consistent with other national and international jurisdictions. Within mental health facilities there is a mix of single and shared rooms. Labor's commitment is that those clients accommodated in shared rooms will be of the same gender.

In October 2009, Labor announced a further major reform in mental health services, designed to promote the importance of looking after our own mental health and wellbeing, and reducing the prevalence and impact of mental health disorders. The reform - *Building the Foundations for Mental Health and Wellbeing* – is based on early intervention and mental health promotion, to help reduce incidents of acute mental illness and hospital admission.

Violence, including sexual violence against women

Labor regards violence against women as one of the most serious human rights abuses and supports a zero tolerance approach to it.

In 2004, Labor's ground breaking *Safe at Home* initiatives commenced. *Safe at Home* comprises 16 separate funded initiatives across four government departments (Justice, Police and Public Safety, Health and Human Services and Premier and Cabinet) as well as the reforms contained within the *Family Violence Act 2004*. In 2008, the *Safe at Home* program was a national winner in the Crime and Violence Protection Awards.

The *Safe at Home* program has been undergoing review over the past year, and Labor is committed to continued improvement of the program. Labor welcomes input from key groups such as the Hobart Women's Health Centre to the *Safe at Home* program and its ongoing development.

Emergency accommodation for all women who are homeless

In December 2009 Labor released the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010 – 2014. The Plan is one of six initiatives under the National Partnership on Homelessness, and was developed with strong input from the specialist homelessness services sector and reference groups on homelessness (comprising both government and non-government representatives). The Plan is based on sound research and outlines the causes and triggers of homelessness.

The Plan is focussed on providing early intervention and prevention support at key life events and transition points. While not developed solely in response to the needs of women, the focus on early intervention to reduce the incidence of homelessness is very significant to women who as mothers, community members and workers need to maintain some stability in their living arrangements. Increasing the supply of housing is critical, but homelessness is much more than putting a roof over someone's head. It involves a whole of system response, including Government, the community, business and non-government sectors.

Consultation on the Plan is currently underway and Labor values contributions from service delivery organisations such as the Hobart Women's Health Centre on how the plan can be implemented effectively.

Respectful relationships and sex education in schools

Labor is committed to providing all Tasmanian young people with the opportunities to help them reach their full potential. Learning about how to develop healthy and respectful relationships – sexual and otherwise – is clearly a fundamental part of that process.

In State Government schools, the study of health and wellbeing enables students to better understand the factors that contribute to the wellbeing of themselves, others and the community. The Health and Wellbeing curriculum provides teachers with a range of age-appropriate learning opportunities which focus on building students' capacity to live fulfilling lives and make informed choices, which rests on developing a strong sense of personal responsibility, identity and self esteem.

Labor's *Student at the Centre* initiative is directing more resources to schools. The initiative enables schools to make decisions on how best to deliver the Health and Wellbeing curriculum to their students. School context, and the needs and interests of students, are important considerations in developing a health and wellbeing curriculum. It is also important that schools develop partnerships with families and communities and have the resources and capacity to deliver a curriculum to meet those needs.

Labor also supports the *Making Choices* program, run through Family Planning Tasmania, which aims to support young people to make good choices about their sexual and reproductive health and relationships, and the RYPLE project (retaining young pregnant and parenting people in learning and education), funded by the Early Years Foundation. These programs are extremely valuable resources for schools and for young Tasmanians.

Eating disorders information and services

Between 2004 and 2008, Labor delivered \$47 million funding for mental health services through *Bridging the Gap* between acute and community mental health. Labor has continued to invest in mental health services at record levels.

One of the major achievements of the *Bridging the Gap* program was to significantly expand Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services with the funding of an additional 26 clinical positions across the State. This has enabled a range of services to be provided to Tasmanians suffering from eating disorders.

A person who has an eating disorder may require a suite of services, or may only require professional counselling. A very small percentage of clients need specialised intensive hospital programs.

People with eating disorders are managed in the community whenever possible. The most common presentations are Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia. The impact of these disorders is considerable, and often requires early intervention and comprehensive medical treatment.

When hospitalisation is required, young people are admitted to either the paediatric unit or adult psychiatric in-patient units at their local regional hospital.

In September 2009, Labor announced \$5 million to build Tasmania's first specialist inpatient unit for the care of children and young people with acute mental illness at the Royal Hobart Hospital.

The unit is expected to be completed in late 2010 and will eliminate the need to routinely accommodate children and adolescents on adult mental health wards.

In the interim, Labor has provided \$545,000 recurrent funding for a dedicated Child and Adolescent inpatient team to be established at the RHH headed by Dr Fiona Wagg, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. This team will transition to the new Unit on completion.

Body image

Labor has a strong commitment to a preventative health approach to addressing obesity by promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity rather than focussing on weight.

Labor is acutely aware of the need to maintain this balance, in order to avoid stigmatisation of people who are overweight or increases in rates of eating disorders.

It is also clear from a comparison of childhood and adult obesity rates that most obese adults were a healthy weight as children. For this reason, strategies need to focus on all children adopting healthy lifestyles, not just those who are overweight and obese.

At a broad policy level *Tasmania Together* is the long term social, economic and environmental plan for Tasmania, developed by the community, setting out what Tasmanians want for themselves and their children by the year 2020.

Tasmania Together has a particular focus on increasing the proportion of children aged 5-14 years participating in organised sport, decreasing the number of Tasmanians who are overweight or obese and increasing the number of Tasmanians over 18 who eat at least two serves of fruit and vegetables a day to improve their health and wellbeing.

Tasmania's Health Plan, delivered by Labor, supports *Tasmania Together* goals by emphasising preventative and early intervention services and recognising the benefits of focusing on health and wellbeing, rather than just responding to demand for acute and chronic disease services.

Under Labor, the Premier's Physical Activity Council established the Tasmanian Physical Activity Plan: LIVE LIFE get moving (2005-2010). This plan outlines a community wide approach to creating a more physically active Tasmanian community to maintain health and wellbeing.

The Tasmanian Food and Nutrition Policy, adopted by Labor in 2004, is a whole of government policy that seeks to ensure a healthy and safe food supply from *farm to fork*, for all Tasmanians. The Policy has been implemented in a partnership between government, non-government, the private and community sectors.

A study in Lancet in 2008 demonstrated that adolescents who had been breastfed beyond 4 months had a lower body mass index and a reduced risk of being overweight than those who had not been breastfed to 4 months. A national ongoing effort to increase breastfeeding duration could have a significant impact on reducing obesity rates well in to the future. Labor is committed to promoting breastfeeding as part of a comprehensive obesity prevention strategy.

Educational and other support for women in prison and post release

Labor's Prison Infrastructure Redevelopment Plan saw the commissioning of new women's facilities at Risdon.

Labor also recently released the *Breaking the Cycle* Discussion Paper – which will result in a long term plan for the future of the corrections system in Tasmania.

That plan will cover the Tasmania Prison Service and Community corrections, and will help to achieve a lowering of the recidivism rate, improve educational and employment opportunities available to inmates, protect the rights of individuals and ensure the safety of our community.

Labor believes that a sound corrections policy delivers not only legal justice, but social justice as well. Many of the women in prison or on community orders have life histories characterised by disadvantage and trauma.

They are often illiterate and innumerate, and have not had the opportunity or support to undertake the kind of training that could lead them to create a secure lifestyle. Often there are immediate costs to the community when a woman is sentenced to a term of imprisonment such as foster care and welfare payments. Labor's objective is to work with non-government organisations to deliver rehabilitation and personal development programs that focus on the needs of offenders. That is what Labor's *Breaking the Cycle* plan is all about.

GPs in Tasmania

Labor recognises the need for more GPs in Tasmania. This is a complex area involving the Australian Government as well as State Government and the medical profession itself in terms of training places, access to provider numbers and general workforce strategies.

Some of these issues are being addressed through the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council, in which Tasmania has been an active participant. The Council is broadly overseeing the implementation of a national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals in Australia, including medical practitioners, which will assist in addressing workforce shortages in to the future.

There has been an increasing feminisation of the GP workforce – as shown in the annual GP Census undertaken by General Practice Tasmania – with an increase in the number and proportion of female GPs and very little change in the number of male GPs across the State. This is a national trend.

General Practice Tasmania has been working closely with the State Government on the implementation of Tasmania's Health Plan, with the objective of improving the sustainability of the State's primary care sector and providing additional capacity to respond to the challenges of chronic disease.

Decisions about bulk-billing are made at the individual practice level and in accordance with the national Medicare scheme.

Health needs of women in rural Tasmania

Tasmania's Health Plan is based on explicit principles for sustainable service design stating that if services can be provided safely, effectively and efficiently they should be provided locally. Where centralisation of services is necessary because of quality, cost or sustainability considerations, access should be facilitated through patient and carer support and service accountability arrangements.

Across rural Tasmania there are 12 community health centres and 16 in-patient facilities that have co-located community health services. Tasmania's Health Plan stated a changed and expanded role for rural health centres will be implemented and that this would include greater access to home based services such as post acute care, more health promotion and management of chronic disease and increased access to visiting services such as allied health.

In meeting the objectives of Tasmania's Health Plan, initiatives have been developed which have increased the provision of outreach services to rural areas. For example the Primary Health Chronic Disease Demonstration Service project with GP North is a proof of concept project that provides for multi-disciplinary service for people with a chronic disease who live in the northern area. It is provided on a hub and spoke model with the hub site located in Launceston at GP North premises. The multi-disciplinary team comprises Podiatrists, Dieticians, Exercise Physiologists, Diabetes Educators, Nurses, and Psychologists and they provide visiting team based services to George Town, St Helens, Exeter / Beaconsfield, Deloraine / Westbury, Campbell Town, St Marys and Scottsdale. The service commenced in April 2010.

Work is also occurring in the three Area Health Services to enable provision of chemotherapy at some rural sites where it is safe for this to occur with appropriately trained and available staff.

Tasmania receives funding through the Australian Government's Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program (MSOAP) which enables medical specialists to deliver outreach services in rural communities as well as providing upskilling and / or professional support to local general practitioners, specialists and other health professionals, such as allied health professionals.

Currently in Tasmania, the Program funds 35 services involving specialties such as geriatrics, psychiatry, rheumatology, obstetrics and gynaecology, endocrinology, oncology, palliative care, dermatology, and neurology visiting a range of communities across the State such as King and Flinders Islands, Queenstown, Smithton, Huonville, Nubeena, Swansea etc. The frequency of visits to communities varies according to need and can be monthly, quarterly, or bi-monthly. For 2009-2010, it is planned that the service visits in Tasmania will total 499. The Program is reviewed annually and if additional Australian Government funding becomes available Tasmania is well placed to seek access to the funds due to the effectiveness of its current service provision and identified need.

Labor is committed to the delivery of services locally where they are safe, efficient and effective and will continue to work collaboratively with the Australian Government to access funding for rural health programs.

Labor is committed to delivering outcomes for women's health issues.

Yours sincerely



David Bartlett MP
Premier

