



18 February 2010

Ms Glynis Flower
Executive Officer
Hobart Women's Health Centre
25 Lefroy Street
North Hobart Tas. 7002

Dear Ms Flower

Thank you for your Email of 14 January requesting responses on women's health issues prior to the State election.

I am happy to respond on behalf of all Liberal Members and candidates. As you would be aware, our Liberal spokesperson on women's issues, Sue Napier, has sadly had to step down because of ill health but Liberal Member for Pembroke and Shadow Attorney-General, Vanessa Goodwin, has indicated her willingness to address women's issues within the party, and attend your forum.

Women's Health policy

The Tasmanian Liberals recognise the importance of developing policies which address the differing health issues between men and women. Women's Health Australia is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and is scheduled to continue until at least 2016. This is a longitudinal study that has been examining the health of Australian women since 1996. Further, the new National Women's Health policy will be released mid-2010.

While I believe there is sufficient emphasis on equality in relation to gender-based health policies, on-the-ground health services and support for women in Tasmania is inadequate as it is for other members of our community.

Liberal health policies, when fully announced, will address that. One policy already released is our *Sooner the Better* policy which ensure that if a public patient waits longer than is clinically recommended, they are entitled to have their elective surgery in a private hospital at no cost to them. In addition, our *Smarter Health* plans, when rolled out around the State, will ensure a full range of health services, from the hospital to the home. This will include more “hospital in the home” initiatives for chronic disease and frequent hospital users, to reduce disruption to family life for patients. It will also include a Rapid Response GP Unit and Development Fund – to ensure greater emphasis on primary health care in our communities, to keep people well and *out* of hospital. Further, there will be more transitional care facilities or step-down beds, located in urban and regional areas so people living outside capital cities can convalesce in their own communities, close to family and friends.

A Hodgman Liberal Government will lobby the Federal Government to ensure Tasmania’s gets its fair share of additional funding for services and support for women as part of the National Women’s Health policy.

Increase in funds for HWHC for health promotion and prevention

A Liberal Government recognises the excellent work of the Hobart Women’s Health Centre in providing services, support and advocacy to women of southern Tasmania, to identify gaps in health service delivery for women and address these. We know how valuable the Centre is to women of all ages, and would ideally like to see this service expanded to other regions of the State. We believe this is something that should come about as a result of the National Women’s Health Policy initiative by the Australian Government, however are prepared to look at partnership arrangements to achieve this.

We would be prepared to receive a submission about the current level of funding provided by DHHS to the Hobart Women’s Health Centre, with a view to ensuring equity throughout the State for womens’ health services.

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

The Liberals’ Fairer Tasmania strategy – a living document first announced in 2007 – is aimed at breaking down barriers to participation with a range of practical measures.

A Hodgman Liberal Government will provide a Fairer Tasmania that –

- . provides better access to services;
- . supports disadvantaged groups and disadvantaged places;
- . reduces barriers to opportunity;
- . gives equity to rural and regional people; and
- . is one where people have rights and respect.

This framework, and the policy commitments within it, will be updated prior to the State election with a series of sensible, practical initiatives that will benefit all Tasmanians, including women. We do believe, however, that social inclusion should be developed from the ground up, by communities for communities, and that we do not need top-heavy bureaucracies to achieve a fairer Tasmania.

In relation to education, the Liberals have announced an overhaul of post-year 10 education by rolling back failed Tasmania Tomorrow reforms, on behalf of the State's teachers, students and parents. Our education policy will concentrate on retention problems in high school and reinstate 'pathway planners' in high schools. Under this policy the Skills Institute will be retained and expanded upon to rapidly grow the opportunities for high quality, relevant, adult learning and training that caters for people who want to change careers, return to the workforce and gain skills that will lead to promotion.

Factors associated with ageing and women's issues

A Hodgman Liberal Government understands the issues associated with ageing, particularly with women living longer than men. Liberal policies for older Tasmanians will be announced shortly.

However, we have already committed to significantly increasing the funds available in the Community Equipment Scheme by \$1.5 million per year (indexed annually) which effectively doubles the amount available for equipment, technology and aids to ensure people with disabilities can participate and continue to live independently.

An investment in health promotion and prevention

Innovative health promotion policies will be announced by the Tasmanian Liberals during the campaign closer to the March 20 election date.

Lack of separate facilities for women in mental health facilities and gynaecology units

The Liberals have continuously raised concerns at the lack of dedicated beds for women in the Royal Hobart Hospital following the merger of the gynaecology and general surgery wards. This remains our concern, particularly with the recent problems regarding problems for accreditation at the RHH obstetrics and gynaecology unit. Specialist staff and the AMA has said this will result in the ongoing reduction in general gynaecology theatre lists for female public patients, and an inferior service for women in Tasmania.

The Liberals' commitment to a redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital on the existing site includes a commitment to look seriously – in our staged construction – at a specialist women and children's hospital.

In relation to separate mental health facilities, the safety of all clients admitted to inpatient mental health facilities is paramount. A Hodgman Liberal Government would be keen to talk with staff and independent mental health advocates about whether the current lay-out of these facilities adequately protects women with mental illness and what, if any, improvements could be made.

We have lobbied hard to ensure a dedicated child and adolescent mental health facility which was promised by the State Labor Government some years ago and still has yet to be established.

Violence, including sexual violence against women and lack of services available for shelter and support and lack of emergency accommodation for all women who are homeless

While the Safe at Home policy is designed to ensure women should not be forced to move in the event of family violence, in practice we find that for many women escaping domestic violence, this is the only option available to them. Many are disadvantaged as a result, and we have had first-hand experience in attempting to find emergency shelter for women and young children fleeing from family violence. The options for crisis accommodation for women and children are scarce, and usually fully prescribed.

While a Hodgman Liberal Government has committed to a review of the safe at home legislation, we are also aware of the commitment by the Federal Government to deliver a national plan to reduce violence against women and their children in 2010 through the Council of Australian Governments, and we support the intention to implement Respectful Relationships programs for school-age young people to change behaviours about violence, for women and children, but also for the shocking increase in race and discrimination-related violence.

We will work constructively with the Australian Government on how to ensure more funding for Tasmania for education and awareness, and work decisively to identify gaps in service delivery (such as the limitations of Tasmania Police to work effectively with family violence victims), and additional crisis accommodation.

A Hodgman Liberal Government has already announced a Sentencing Advisory Council in acknowledgement of the community's concerns at the leniency of some serious crimes, including rape and sexual assault, and we would ensure serious interaction with the judiciary to bring about a matrix to ensure that sentences awarded to people convicted of those sexual crimes receive sentences more in line with community expectations.

We will also add to the Parole Board a person representing the interests of victims of crime.

We will also ensure compulsory sexual offender treatment for prisoners.

Lack of coordinated approach to respectful relationships and sex education in schools

See response above in relation to respectful relationship programs.

The Liberals are currently investigating best options for strengthening sex education in our schools.

The lack of eating disorders information and services in Tasmania

The Tasmanian Liberals released a discussion paper on eating disorders in May 2008 to stimulate debate and community feedback and assist in the development of a coordinated strategic policy direction to combat eating disorders in Tasmania.

Liberal policy on improving eating disorder information and services is set out in this document.

Body image issues and concentrate on weight and obesity instead of healthy lifestyle

Late last year, the Shadow Health Minister, Brett Whiteley, was pleased to co-sponsor a visit to Tasmania by the author of *Getting Real. Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*, Melinda Tankard Reist, who toured the State talking to school girls on this important matter.

The Tasmanian Liberals are all too aware that our young women and girls grow up surrounded by sexual imagery and pressures on body image. Education and awareness of eating disorders will assist in getting the message across that good health is about a range of factors, including good nutrition and exercise, not just about weight. Our teachers are already delivering this positive message. The wider community and governments have to match that effort.

Lack of coordinated educational and other support for women in prison and lack of post-release services for women

The rate of educational programs in Tasmanian prisons has fallen dramatically – according to the Justice Department latest annual report, out of 552 prisoners, only 33% were undertaking any education or training, the lowest percentage in five years.

The Liberals' Justice policy will be announced shortly.

The Tasmanian Liberals have also been lobbying for the continuation of innovative drug and alcohol treatment programs delivered by Holyoake to women in prison, which are at risk due to lack of government funding.

Programs that provide post-release transitional housing to male prisoners should be duplicated for women, and this should be negotiated with non-government service providers.

Lack of GPs, especially female GPs, and bulk billing services throughout Tasmania

I note that bulk-billing GP services are provided through the Hobart Women's Health Centre, and agree that there is a general shortage of GPs in Tasmania, and a further shortage of bulk-billing opportunities. The issue of bulk-billing – and the encouragements for doctors to pursue this – is a Federal Government matter. On the matter of GP shortages, the Liberals recently announced part of a full policy package that will see rapid responses in the event of unexpected GP shortages in our communities.

The particular health needs of women in rural Tasmania

The Tasmanian Liberals are intent on delivering more health services, closer to home. Policies already announced include –

- ensuring people on the North-West Coast can access radiotherapy and MRI services (currently patients have to travel to Launceston or Hobart for 10 minutes of radiotherapy treatment daily);
- the introduction of “flying clinics” of allied and other health professionals into remote areas of the East, West and North-West Coasts, and the Bass Strait Islands;
- doubling step-down beds in the Huon area so patients can convalesce in their own communities, close to families and friends;
- more health services with increased numbers of doctors, nurses and general practice sessions on the West Coast, in the towns of Queenstown, Zeehan, Rosebery and Strahan.

In addition, we have announced –

- equity of financial assistance for grandparents raising their grandchildren; and
- early intensive intervention services for children with autism, acknowledging that many families with an autistic child are broken families and it is, in many cases, the mother who is raising the child.

We would expect to announce more policies during the campaign, and these can be found at www.tasliberal.com.au or by phoning our offices.

Yours sincerely



Will Hodgman MP
Leader of the Opposition