

MEDIA STATEMENT

Thursday, 22 April 2021

Response to Island and Surrounds News regarding access to GPs and health services

This statement may be attributed to Rachele Foreman, Executive Manager | Health Systems Improvement

Brisbane North PHN has released an Invitation to Tender for the Bribie Island After-Hours Pilot Project, following a comprehensive co-design process involving key stakeholders and the local community. The tender closes at 5.00 pm Thursday, 13 May 2021.

The purpose of the pilot project is to implement and evaluate a primary care after-hours response for the Bribie Island community over a three-year period, concluding by 30 June 2024.

Over the course of February and March 2021, the PHN engaged Beacon Strategies to facilitate the co-design process, which involved a series of workshops on Bribie Island and individual conversations with some stakeholders who were unable to attend the workshops.

The aim of the process was to understand local community needs and potential after-hours solutions for the Bribie Island community.

Consultation is key to the process and this is consistent with the PHN's role as a [commissioner of healthcare services](#) and our [commissioning framework](#).

The Australian Government announced \$500,000 for the pilot project in September 2020. However, consultation regarding this matter effectively began in June 2019 via an approach by the Former State Member for Pumicestone Simone Wilson to Metro North Hospital and Health Service.

The Federal Member for Longman, Mr Terry Young MP, became involved at that point, given access to GP services is an Australian Government responsibility. At Mr Young's request, the PHN undertook to develop a needs assessment of Bribie Island after-hours GP services for the Australian Government.

Working collaboratively with all stakeholders, the PHN assessed the after-hours GP access need within the context of the broader healthcare access issues facing the Island's residents. Access to hospital care, ambulance services, allied health and GPs during normal business hours all factored into the consultations.

The PHN's needs assessment into after-hours GP access on Bribie Island identified a number of issues, including that Bribie Island's ageing population had limited or no access to after-hours GP services.

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Around the same time, in July 2019, the Australian Government introduced the Distribution Priority Area (DPA) classification system, replacing the existing Districts of Workforce Shortage (DWS) Assessment Areas for General Practitioners (GPs) and Bonded Doctors. This new system is intended to improve the allocation of medical practitioners throughout Australia.

As consultations progressed toward addressing the after-hours GP access concerns, subsequent stakeholder feedback revealed that overall demand for GP services on the island had increased and access to GPs had decreased during normal hours.

Analysis indicates the supply-demand issues may be due to a range of factors, including potentially the impact of the DPA classification system on the ability of practices in outer-lying areas like Bribie Island to recruit GPs. Reclassification under the system may have also presented viability issues for practices. Brisbane North PHN and other Primary Health Networks have brought this to the attention of the Australian Government Department of Health.

Other contributing factors for the supply-demand issues potentially include:

- a number of GPs in the region nearing retirement and recently retiring
- a larger part-time workforce than in previous years
- an aging population with higher and more complex primary care needs
- accelerating population growth and socioeconomic factors, and
- increased reliance on the provision of complex care in the primary care setting.

Hospital care is a State Government responsibility and, in October 2020, Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk announced an election commitment to invest \$265 million for seven new innovative Satellite Hospitals across South East Queensland, one of which would service Bribie Island. The PHN is in consultation with the Queensland Government and Metro North Hospital and Health Service regarding the Satellite Hospitals, including their capacity to alleviate demand on primary care.

Following the Australian Government's September 2020 announcement of the after-hours pilot project, the PHN worked to secure a contract with the Department of Health to commission the required services. The funding became available once the contract was signed in January 2021.

The available funding is time-limited and non-recurrent with the express purpose of establishing a financially sustainable primary care after-hours service for Bribie Island residents and visitors, enabling access to primary care after-hours service responses for the community, as close to home as possible.

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, much had changed since the PHN produced its needs assessment, so it was important to co-design a solution that met the current and future needs of the community.

With the release of the Invitation to Tender, the PHN looks forward to working with the Bribie Island community and all interested stakeholders to trial an after-hours primary care service for Bribie Island.

The key aims of the Bribie Island After-Hours pilot project are to:

- improve access to after-hours services for residents of and visitors to Bribie Island
- create a sustainable, blended payment after-hours model of care for Bribie Island residents that is appropriate for the region's specific needs
- reduce pressure on nearby emergency departments by providing after-hours primary care services
- evaluate the effectiveness of blended funding models in improving access to after-hours primary care on Bribie Island and potential for extension of the model to other population centres with similar needs, and
- ensure the after-hours model of care can adapt to the changing environment e.g. impact of COVID-19 on practice models.

For more information about the Invitation to Tender, go to <https://www.australianenders.com.au/tenders/453278/bribie-island-after-hours-pilot-project/>

ENDS

About Brisbane North PHN

Brisbane North PHN is one of 31 Primary Health Networks nationwide and supports clinicians and communities within North Brisbane, Moreton Bay and parts of the Somerset region. The PHN covers approximately 4,100 km² of urban, regional and rural areas, with a population of over one million.

The key objectives of the PHN are:

- increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes, and
- improving coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time.