



Health priority: Chronic conditions

What do we mean?

Chronic conditions are conditions with complex and multiple causes and are a leading cause of premature morbidity and mortality. Chronic conditions occur either alone or as multi-morbidity. Chronic conditions occur across the life cycle, becoming more prevalent with older age. Chronic conditions are long term, with some becoming complex, and can compromise quality of life.

The relationship of chronic conditions to all of our other health priority areas is important. Prevention is important in reducing the impact of chronic conditions; primary prevention can prevent the development of conditions, secondary prevention can detect and treat early signs or risk factors and tertiary prevention can reduce the impact, complications or suffering caused by a chronic condition. Some groups experience a higher burden of chronic conditions, and are at risk of poorer health outcomes including Aboriginal people, people with a mental illness diagnosis and people with issues related to drug and/or alcohol misuse. End of life care must also be integrated into management of many chronic conditions.

Why is this a priority?

Chronic conditions are the predominant cause of illness, premature mortality and health system utilisation in the south eastern NSW region. Improving care for people with chronic conditions can make a real difference to the long term health and wellbeing of local residents. PHNs have an important role in facilitating, linking and co-designing activities within primary health care, and across the broader health and social care sectors, to improve development of coordinated and comprehensive care for prevention and management of chronic conditions.

What has the data told us?

Key points from our analysis of population health needs across south eastern NSW include:

Health status needs

- relatively high prevalence of chronic conditions, as well as lifestyle and clinical risk factors for chronic conditions, suitable for primary and secondary prevention across the region
- high rates of premature mortality related to chronic conditions

Health service utilisation

- poor coordination of care associated with lack of affordable, timely services to refer onto
- lack of affordable chronic disease prevention programs targeting risk factors such as physical inactivity and poor nutrition
- relatively high rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations with top 5 conditions being chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive cardiac failure, cellulitis, diabetes complications and urinary tract infections

What have our stakeholders told us?

Feedback from service providers tells us:

- there is a lack of coordination between providers in the health system which impacts on efficient service delivery and improved health outcomes

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- there is a lack of service providers to support interdisciplinary team care
- many consumers are unable, or unwilling to pay out of pocket cost for services that are available

Consumers have identified:

- many experience difficulty accessing treatments due to limited service availability, long waiting times and cost barriers, leading to a further deterioration in both mental and physical wellbeing
- many consumers are unaware of wellness programs and think there are inadequate opportunities in their local area to be physically active or improve their diet and manage their weight

What is our approach?

Our goals for chronic conditions are:

- potentially preventable hospitalisations are avoided due to timely and effective health care, usually delivered in primary care and community-based care settings close to a person's home
- delivery of a sustainable whole-of-system response to prevention and management of chronic conditions

Our chronic conditions initiatives are systems focused, framed by the development of patient centred medical homes and health care neighbourhoods.

To achieve this, we will work across our four levels of person centred interventions as outlined in our Business model:

