

Advice

Integration of care: from fragmented to seamless

Introduction

The Victorian Clinical Council identified the integration of care across Victorian health services as a priority issue. This topic was considered across two council meetings held on 16 June 2017 and 14 September 2017.

The need for a more integrated system of health care is also supported by the Victorian Government as indicated in key strategic documents such as Health 2040: Advancing health, access and care and the Statewide Design, Service and Infrastructure Plan for Victorian's Health System 2017-2037. Funding commitments to support better, earlier and more integrated care are also set out in the Government's 2017-18 Budget Papers.

Consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) identified an opportunity for the council to inform the foundations of a statewide integrated care strategy for Victoria. The council recognises the challenge of achieving a truly integrated system given current governance and funding arrangements across Commonwealth and state systems. It is anticipated that the council will return to this topic as the system continues to evolve.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop an integrated care strategy for Victoria

The strategy should set out a clear vision and approach for an integrated Victorian health system that ultimately provides better outcomes and experiences for patients. The strategy should be underpinned by the following:

Definition

The council recommends the following definition of integrated care for Victoria:

Person centred care that crosses the boundaries between primary, community, acute health and social care and where the right care is delivered at the right place at the right time.

Principles

The principles of an integrated system are the same as those that underlie any system delivering high quality care. These include, at a minimum:

- person-centred care
- clear and simple access to care
- capable, multidisciplinary workforce
- services reflect and respond to local need.

Enablers

The following enablers are considered fundamental elements of an integrated healthcare system for Victoria:

- governed by an overarching, statewide approach
- funding models that incentivise and drive system-wide integration
- governed by joint service planning and shared goals across acute, primary and community services
- supported by a flexible workforce that is enabled to deliver integrated care
- supported by quality information technology systems that connect providers
- informed by quality, relevant and transparent data

Recommendation 2: Embedding integrated care across the Victorian health system

The department to utilise various mechanisms that will embed integrated care across the Victorian health system. The department to consider:

- including provisions for integrated care into service agreements
- developing outcome measures that are relevant to integrated care.

Recommendation 3: Partnerships across boundaries

Partnerships within and across service and governance boundaries are essential if we are to move forward towards an integrated system. These partnerships require buy-in and commitment from all involved stakeholders, including all relevant branches within the department as well as with:

- consumers
- the Commonwealth Government
- Safer Care Victoria
- Victorian primary health networks
- acute, primary and community health services.

Advice development - overview

Background

Significant work is underway across the health system to improve integration. Much of this work aims to support integration within and between primary, community and acute services to better support people with chronic or complex care needs. This effort is being driven by Commonwealth and state health departments as well as health services and consumers.

Integrating health and social care is generally recognised as a key mechanism to improve access, outcomes and consumer experience in an environment which is feeling the pressure of a growing and ageing population, increased prevalence of chronic disease, increased survival rates, rising costs of care and technology, and changing community expectations regarding service provision.

In New Zealand, the Canterbury health system provides a prime example of how increasing demand and expenditure on acute health services can be shifted towards integrated models of working together across the health system. This example shows the benefits of integration for consumers and the health system where service silos and organisational boundaries are removed, investment is made in community-based services and primary care is strengthened.

The council identified an opportunity to align the various programs of work in the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services by supporting an agreed understanding of what integration of care means, and what it could look like in the Victorian context.