

NBMPHN Response to COVID-19

10 June 2020

Since the early days of the COVID pandemic, Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN) has continued to adapt and respond to the new COVID-19 environment in terms of business continuity and ensuring the work health and safety of staff, as well as the organisation's role in supporting the health response to COVID-19. This is a summary of the COVID-19 work we are undertaking to support healthcare providers, through five main streams of work.

i. COVID-19 plan for supporting General Practice

We are supporting General Practice in the NBM region to manage their response with the impact of COVID-19 on their practice and services. Key initiatives include:

- 1. Establishing three GP- led COVID-19 respiratory clinics across the region** – located in Penrith, Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury, and promoting all local options for COVID-19 testing:
www.nbmpnh.com.au/Community/Coronavirus
- 2. Providing up to date, relevant information to General Practice** – Through twice weekly COVID update bulletins, email alerts, social media updates and COVID specific pages on our website, including links to reputable information sources and COVID educational opportunities:
www.nbmpnh.com.au/Health-Professionals/Coronavirus. We have also updated our Mental Health Help website with new services on a weekly basis: www.mentalhealthhelp.com.au
- 3. Compiling and distributing information on business support financial measures** – Developed and distributed a *COVID-19: Financial Support Measures for General Practices Fact Sheet* to assist General Practice access the supports available through the new government measures:
www.nbmpnh.com.au/COVIDfinancialsupport
- 4. Supporting Access to PPE** – Providing surgical and P2 masks to General Practice and the Penrith Aboriginal Medical Service and keeping updated commercial PPE supplier lists on our website:
www.nbmpnh.com.au/Health-Professionals/Coronavirus/Mask-Distribution
- 5. Assessing impacts for General Practice and provision of practice support** – This includes support with implementation of telehealth, communication on PIP changes due to COVID, flu clinics, promoting COVID health pathways, gathering feedback on practice closures, challenges and support needs of practices. Our COVID-19 GP Clinical Council guides our work.
- 6. Development of COVID-19 specific clinical HealthPathways for General Practice** - which have high visitation and usage: nbm.communityhealthpathways.org/723535.htm
- 7. Advocating to better integrate care for COVID-19 patients** – to support improved communication and a more connected healthcare approach to COVID-19 management across primary, community and acute care services
- 8. General Practice Self Care** - Explore opportunities to support GP self-care and sharing of ideas amongst peers.
- 9. Workforce Infection Control and Surge Capacity** – to support infection control training to the primary care, aged care and broader health care workforce sectors and support coordination activities to identify options to address workforce shortages in the region due to COVID.
- 10. 'Don't put your health on hold' community promotion** – a small social media campaign to encourage the community to continue to visit their GP during the COVID environment.
- 11. Providing our services through telehealth/online** – our mental health providers have established telehealth service delivery capability. We've also worked closely with commissioned providers to

support them to continue to provide services, including through transitioning to telehealth or online events.

ii. COVID-19 plan for supporting Allied Health

We are supporting Allied Health providers in the region to manage their response with the impact of COVID-19 on their practice and services. Key initiatives include:

1. **Allied Health Peer Networking & training** – Enabling providers to share ideas, discuss issues and upskill in topics such as infection control.
2. **Information on business support financial measures** – Produced a *COVID-19: Financial Support Measures for Allied Health Practices* Fact Sheet to outline the supports available through the new government measures: www.nbmphn.com.au/COVIDfinancialsupport
3. **Fortnightly COVID-19 communication e-newsletter** – which provides information on relevant COVID related webinars, infection control, COVID-19 information relevant to the region, telehealth items, PPE changes, and links to reputable information sources. We've also updated our mental health providers through newsletters and telehealth training.
4. **Allied Health Pathways** - Development of relevant health pathways to support Allied Health in the COVID environment through the Health Pathways Program.
5. **Support accessing PPE** – Provision of masks to allied health providers in accordance with the directions of the Commonwealth Dept. of Health and keeping updated commercial PPE supplier listings on our website: www.nbmphn.com.au/Health-Professionals/Coronavirus/Mask-Distribution

iii. COVID-19 plan for supporting Residential Aged Care Facilities

Given the impact of a potential COVID-19 outbreak for a Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF) and the role of GPs in providing care to residents, we have worked with RACFs to support pandemic planning, developed relevant HealthPathways and been involved in the response phase to a COVID outbreak in a local RACF, by providing on-site doctors to be the arms and legs for GPs who usually provide care to residents: www.nbmphn.com.au/COVIDandRACFs.

In addition, we have assisted DoH by conducting an audit of the status of flu vaccinations and needs of aged care facilities (staff and residents) in the region. This has been used to identify where support may be required to ensure RACFs have both the supplies and vaccinators to enable timely staff and resident flu vaccinations.

iv. Additional Mental Health services for the community

The Federal Government recently announced funding to support the mental health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A large part of this response is reaching vulnerable persons within

the community who have been disproportionately impacted. A number of measures will be delivered by PHNs with further detail and funding allocations to come.

v. Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders

Special meetings have been held with our GP and Allied Health Clinical Councils and the Community Advisory Committee on COVID-19 which guide the organisation's response.

We act as a point of contact for MPs seeking information to respond to community enquiries in relation to COVID, and communicate with MPs and other stakeholders through regular newsletters and updates.

We are also active members of the NBMLHD Emergency Operations Centre teleconferences which enables sharing of information on COVID in our region.

We participate in regular teleconferences with the Department of Health and liaise with key stakeholders to improve the integration of care for COVID patients and advocate for ongoing telehealth usage in primary care.