

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HEALESVILLE AND YARRA RANGES COMMUNITIES**

Dear Community Member

As you may be aware, Eastern Health's Board of Directors recently approved our 10-year Strategic Clinical Service Plan, known as *Eastern Health 2022*.

As part of our commitment to keep the community informed, we are taking this opportunity to write to you directly.

*Eastern Health 2022* is a long-term plan that recommends the future service profile of Eastern Health to ensure all our clinical services meet the healthcare needs of our communities now and in the future – a blueprint for providing the right mix of services over the next 10 years.

This plan, in its draft form, attracted significant community interest, particularly in the Healesville and Yarra Ranges region. I would like to thank the hundreds of people involved in the plan's development and particularly those in the community who provided valuable feedback during the three months the plan was open for community consultation.

I would like to clarify some background information regarding the development of *Eastern Health 2022*:

- Further to extensive consultation with our staff, *Eastern Health 2022* was developed with input from the Department of Health, other hospitals and healthcare providers. We engaged with local GPs at a GP forum on 15 February 2011 and via a written survey. Our Community Advisory Committee was also involved in the development of the draft plan.
- Eastern Health welcomed input from the local community which was given an opportunity to tell us what they wanted from their local health service at an initial community forum on 26 May 2011, which was advertised in the local media.
- Once we had a draft plan to present to the community, we organised a number of community forums across the region to allow the general public an opportunity to learn more about the recommendations and provide their feedback.
- Eastern Health arranged two public forums in Healesville and a specially-convened meeting with the Eastern Health Board of Directors for a representative group from Healesville. The draft plan was also made available on our website and in the Healesville and Yarra Junction libraries to allow our communities every opportunity to review the draft plan and provide their input.

We received a substantial amount of feedback from the Healesville and Yarra Ranges community and all of this feedback was considered by the Eastern Health Board.

We were pleased to announce on 28 March 2013 that, as a result of this rigorous consultation and based on broad feedback from the local community, in addition to all of the previously

recommended services were planned for Healesville & District Hospital, we had amended the plan to ensure surgical services, including colonoscopy, gastroscopy and low-complexity surgery, will continue at Healesville & District Hospital. *Eastern Health 2022* also includes a plan to introduce renal dialysis into an expanded suite of services at the hospital. In summary, health services at the site will increase under this plan.

Notwithstanding reports to the contrary, Eastern Health has always been committed to providing the community with timely information about the plan. As part of this commitment, Eastern Health contacted the representative group from Healesville directly after the Board meeting on 28 March 2013. We also provided the local media with the announcement immediately after the Board approved the plan to ensure we could meet their publication deadlines and so the community would learn the outcome of the meeting as soon as possible.

Regrettably, some of the information we have provided to the community has been misinterpreted, resulting in confusion about *Eastern Health 2022* and the future of health services in Healesville and the Yarra Ranges.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify those points:

- **Future of Healesville & District Hospital**  
Suggestions that Eastern Health is deliberately “running down” services and planning to close the hospital are not true. Inpatient activity at the hospital has increased by 10 per cent in the past six years. We are planning to expand healthcare services overall at the hospital to provide excellent healthcare for the local community.
- **Birthing services at Healesville & District Hospital**  
It was always our intention to include provision for a birthing suite in preparation for any future increase in demand for birthing services – and if the appropriate mix of skilled staff becomes available to support a safe, high-quality birthing service. *Eastern Health 2022* simply reaffirms this commitment.
- **Local access to health services**  
The assumption that local people are not able to access Healesville & District Hospital is also incorrect. In the past six years, the number of local residents using the hospital has increased. In fact, 82 per cent of patients treated at the hospital are from the local area – a 17 per cent increase since 2006.
- **Medical staffing levels at Healesville & District Hospital**  
Eastern Health recently standardised its payment model within our surgical services. This change will improve medical staff coverage across Eastern Health, including Healesville & District Hospital, and enhance service delivery and capacity. This change is not part of *Eastern Health 2022* and will not affect the delivery of clinical services.
- **Redevelopment**  
Preparations are underway to start the \$3 million capital redevelopment of Healesville & District Hospital and Yarra Valley Community Health. This is in addition to the education centre built in 2012. Throughout the redevelopment, Eastern Health and the Department of Health will communicate with our local community.

*Eastern Health 2022* provides stability and certainty for Healesville & District Hospital and Yarra Valley Community Health.

While *Eastern Health 2022* will guide future decisions, it does allow for flexibility to adapt to future changes and trends. Eastern Health will continue to review and consult with our communities throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Eastern Melbourne Medicare Local supports the planning work of *Eastern Health 2022* to improve service capacity and availability within Yarra Ranges, Maroondah and Knox. Eastern Health will also continue to work in collaboration with the Medicare Local and our community health partners in this regard.

I realise that the consultation period has been a difficult time for some of our staff and the community as we plan for the future. However, I believe this plan provides a significant increase to the range of services available locally at Healesville & District Hospital and Yarra Valley Community Health, ensuring both services have bright futures.

The bottom line is that we are planning more services for our community than are currently available and this is a good outcome for the people we serve.

I would encourage you to take the time to review the enclosed service summary, which outlines our future direction for Healesville & District Hospital and Yarra Valley Community Health.

Eastern Health's Board Chair, Dr Joanna Flynn AM and I will continue to meet with the Minister for Health, the Hon David Davis to progress the implementation of *Eastern Health 2022*.

*Eastern Health 2022* – the full and final plan – is now available on the Eastern Health website at [www.easternhealth.org.au](http://www.easternhealth.org.au).

Eastern Health values feedback from our patients, their families, carers and the wider community. If you would like to provide feedback about our services, we encourage you to get in touch with us by emailing [feedback@easternhealth.org.au](mailto:feedback@easternhealth.org.au), via post to 251 Mountain Hwy, Wantirna 3152 or on our website at [www.easternhealth.org.au](http://www.easternhealth.org.au).

Eastern Health's focus now is to get on with the job of providing quality health services to all our communities.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alan Lilly', written in a cursive style.

Alan Lilly  
Chief Executive  
Eastern Health