

WITS No.: 114629

Petition No: PET20/1/LC

Response to Petition

Title of Petition: Medical Services in Strahan

Your Petitioners - Residents of Strahan and citizens of Tasmania - are extremely concerned that -

- 1 With little notice and just prior to the arrival of the largest seasonal influx of visitors to Strahan, Strahan has lost the services of a full-time doctor;
- 2 A doctor will now only be in attendance at the clinic for three days per week and the surgery will be closed entirely for the remaining four days;
- 3 Nursing services have been completely ceased in Strahan and will not be provided at any time during the week;
- 4 That this situation will have a deleterious effect on tourism numbers, negatively impacting the town; and
- 5 As Strahan's population can treble during summer, we believe it is essential that medical services are available to the general population and visitors who have no means of travelling the forty-five minutes over winding road to the nearest medical centre;

And your Petitioners request that the Legislative Council strongly urge the Minister for Health to

- 1 Investigate and take action to restore more regular medical services; and
- 2 Reinstate regular nursing care to Strahan residents and visitors.

Government's Position:

- The Tasmanian Government recognises the important role that private General Practice (GP) clinics play in delivering essential primary healthcare services for our community.
- While the State Government is not responsible for private GP services and has no ability to influence operational and staffing decisions, we maintain a strong interest in the sector and have had significant and consistent engagement with key primary health stakeholders, particularly as we develop our plans and strategies to protect Tasmanians and meet any challenges posed by COVID-19.
- As a Government, we always want to see more GPs calling Tasmania home and encourage all Tasmanians to continue engaging with their local GP on their health needs.

- The Tasmanian Health Service (THS) has advised the GP clinic at Strahan is privately operated by Ochre Health.
- The THS is aware that Ochre Health is fully committed to providing quality and sustainable primary care services to the West Coast. On the West Coast there are also private clinics at Queenstown, Rosebery, and Zeehan providing general medical services to local communities.
- Ochre Health notified the THS in late 2019 that in response to patient demand, it is trialling a change in operational service model that involved relocating unutilised GP resources between Strahan and Zeehan, as well as a change of clinic service hours – with its Strahan service opening three days a week and its Zeehan service opening five days a week.
- This interim trial model is being assessed monthly and Ochre Health will continue to monitor activity and advise the THS as required.
- In February 2020, Ochre Health further advised the THS that they had seen an improved alignment of GP services for the region, in particular at Zeehan.
- The THS and the Government will also continue to engage regularly with primary care organisations such as Primary Health Tasmania and Health Recruitment Plus to support the primary care sector where possible.



Sarah Courtney MP
Minister for Health