

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Men's Health

My name is David Hughes and I am a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Men's Health working full time in Bangalow, Northern New South Wales. I am employed by the North Coast Area Health Service (NCAHS). My clinical role encompasses all areas of men's health from adolescence to fathering and retirement and prostate cancer. I provide a range of services including "expectant father's classes" and "Prostate Cancer Support Nursing". I am on a number of committees including the NCAHS Area Nursing Council and Area Clinical Council and am the NC AHS Men's Health Representative to the State Dept of Health. I work with the Primary Health and Community Partnerships Branch of the State Dept of Health to support policy and Action Plan development, and have done so for about five years now.

I would be please to provide my opinions on the four areas of investigation for your information.

1. FUNDING:

I am not aware of any funding from NSW Dept of Health to Area Health Services that is provided to address Prostate or Testicular Cancer needs of men and boys. Nor am I ware of any other funding sources that target these cancer conditions in relation to providing comprehensive support services.

2. ADEQUACY of EXISTING EDUCATION and AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS:

Although the Prostate Cancer Foundation and local Prostate Cancer Support Groups (I am on the Committee of the Alstonville Group) provide ad hoc awareness activities, there is a need for a planned and strategic program, both media based and person focussed, to raise awareness in local men in the 40-70 age brackets. The lack of awareness of health professionals including G.P's, physiotherapists, nurses and managers of health services acts as a detractor when attempts are made to educate local populations of both men and women regarding male related cancers. That is to say, we need the health workforce to understand the issues and therapies so that we can provide comprehensive, evidence based service to our populations.

3. ATTITUDES OF MEN TOWARDS THEIR OWN HEALTH:

It is evident that men do care about their own health status. Access to health related facilities and costs can limit their participation in self help activities. As the vast majority of men work during business hours and so do most health professionals, there will be an imbalance between appropriate health seeking behaviours and actual behaviours. Rural and isolated men have less access to medical and specialist services and this is reflected in the 50% increase in poorer outcomes for these men with prostate cancer. Integrated "Primary Care Centres" with G.P's, nurses and Allied Health Professionals working together in an extended hours model, would be a great service provision model to capture men (and women) to improve and manage their health needs.

4. EXTENT,FUNDING and, ADEQUACY of TREATMENT SERVICES and SUPPORT PROGRAMS

As a rural Community Health Nurse specialising in Men's health I can state with confidence that there is a real lack of specialist medical/nursing, radiology, surgical and support services for men with prostate cancer .Funding is non-existent for Prostate Cancer Support Nursing. I am funded as a generalist nurse and am less able every month to provide a specialist men's health service due to financial cut backs by the state government. After numerous attempts to map out a network of like service providers, I have come to the conclusion that I am the ONLY Men's Health Nurse north of Newcastle supporting men and their families through the journey of Prostate cancer. The support program that I have organised is based on my ability to self educate and self fund all my men's health activities. The Area Health Service has no services or programs that target men and boys with cancer .My medium term capacity to remain in this position is unclear at best. The Federal and State Government need to create partnerships with Cancer Councils and the Prostate Foundation to immediately begin the process of mapping out men's needs related to awareness, diagnosis, therapy and long term recovery regarding prostate cancer. I have been providing a support, advocacy and therapeutic service in the local community for about four years now and am convinced that many such "Nurse Initiated" services must be provided throughout metropolitan, rural and regional Australia if we are to curb the disturbing death rates attributed to Prostate Cancer. General Men's health Support Programs need to include stress management, becoming a man, fatherhood and fathering, life after separation, general physical and emotional health, retirement and the full range of disease related issues for men. These services and service providers should be able to access and support men from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds to ensure appropriateness.