

10.1.2. GM - 26/09/2022 - Update on Lithgow Community Private (LCP)

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Department Human Resources

Authorised by General Manager

Summary

Lithgow Community Private (LCP) is a unique model of delivery for private medical services which has now been in operation for 22 years. The model involves LCP procuring theatre space and other resources from the Nepean Blue Mts Local Health District to support private specialists.

Prior to Covid the model was, by and large, effective. But challenges in accessing theatres and the other related required resources (because of Covid impacting health resources) have profoundly compromised the viability of this model of health services delivery. Recently the Board of LCP took the decision that they do not continue to operate after 2022.

Lithgow has a significant aged cohort of the local population. Also, the socio-economic circumstances of our community predispose it to certain adverse health consequences. Also, there is a cluster of medical businesses and services which agglomerate around LCP because they are complementary. Removal of the specialist medical component (LCP) of this small but important health ecosystem could have implications for the performance of all of these other health services. Lithgow is not a local government area that can endure any reduction in medical services. In fact, there is the risk this could result in an unacceptable spiral down in terms of local availability and access to much-needed health services. Council has been advocating to prevent such an adverse outcome

Commentary

This report provides information about the announcement by the Lithgow Community Private that they are not able to function beyond 2022. It also details the actions that have been taken by Council in relation to this advice. The report draws mostly from briefings that have been provided to the Mayor and General Manager by the LCP Board.

Lithgow Community Private (LCP) is a not-for-profit, community owned day surgery and specialist medical centre. LCP was established in 1999. LCP is governed by a volunteer Board and employs around 20 staff in permanent part time positions and medical traineeships.

Today LCP provides private day surgery and specialist medical services to Lithgow and surrounding communities.

LCP state that each year they provide the community with over 900 day surgery procedures and around 11,500 specialist medical appointments via 35 specialist visiting medical officers. LCP also assert that there is interest from other specialists to offer their services out of LCP.

LCP is co-located with Lithgow Public Hospital and rents premises and operating theatres from NBMLHD. LCP delivers their services through a public – private type service arrangement with the NSW Government by way of the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (NMBLHD). It has been put to Council that this is a somewhat unique arrangement.

The impact of Covid on the public and private health systems is well-documented, and on-going. It has been put to Council that Covid has created great difficulty for the staffing of theatres and this has impacted both surgeon and patient demand, undermining the viability of LCP. The other consequence has been that patients are being loaded back onto Bathurst, Orange and Sydney for procedures that could be done locally.

LCP have advised of the following impacts if they cease to function -

- “The Lithgow community will be substantially disadvantaged by the loss of visiting specialists
- Patients forced to travel outside the region for services they once had here
- \$1.7 million economic value leaves the region
- Local job losses
- Large increase in public surgery waiting lists as patients move to have their surgeries performed via the public system
- Loss of funding from Rural Doctors Network”

It may also be the case that the closure of LCP, or the lack of an equivalent replacement model locally would impact –

- Utilisation of the soon to be completed MRI
- Notre Dame Medical School
- Westfund, as many of LCP’s patients use that insurer (a large local employer and provider of access for the community to a level of health equity)

LCP are confident that the general model under which they have operated for the last 22 years is still appropriate. But LCP have made the decision that based on the current service agreement they are not able to continue. It has been put to Council by the NBMLHD that they recognise the value of, and the community need for, the LCP provided medical services. Council has been assured that the NBMLHD are actively working on solutions. At the time of writing this report both parties were still negotiating.

Since LCP made their decision about discontinuing, Council has been advocating for an ongoing business model that is viable and not constrained. This would include reliable and assured access to theatre time and other resources so that the visiting specialists had certainty of being able to practice and deliver much needed medical services effectively. The advocacy has included representations being made to the local State and Federal Members, the NSW Minister for Health, the NSW Minister for Regional Health, the Chair of the NBMLHD and the CEO of the NBMLHD.

Policy Implications

Nil

Financial Implications

- Budget approved - Nil
- Cost centre - N/A
- Expended to date - Nil
- Future potential impact – Lithgow has a significant aged cohort of the local population. The socio-economic circumstances of the community predispose it to certain adverse health consequences. Also, there is a cluster of medical businesses and services which agglomerate around LCP because they are complementary. Removal of the specialist medical component (LCP) of this small but important health ecosystem could have implications for the performance of all of these other health services. Lithgow is not a local government area that can endure any reduction in medical services. In fact, there is the risk this could result in an unacceptable spiral down in terms of local availability and access to much-needed health services.

Legal and Risk Management Implications

Nil

Attachments

Nil

Recommendation

THAT

1. The report Update on Lithgow Community Private received, and
2. Council formally and publicly confirm and continue to advocate to the NSW Government its position that it is imperative that the Lithgow community have ongoing access to the important specialist medical services that are provided by Lithgow Community Private.