
MEDIA RELEASE

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Alexandra District Health and Eastern Health recommend voluntary amalgamation to strengthen local care

The Boards of Alexandra District Health and Eastern Health have formally recommended a voluntary amalgamation to strengthen access to care closer to home for the Alexandra and district community.

A comprehensive business case has found the voluntary amalgamation would create a more sustainable local health service and support the delivery of more connected care across the rural–metropolitan catchment by strengthening the established partnership that is already benefiting local patients and staff.

Around 40 per cent¹ of hospital care for people living in the Alexandra catchment is currently provided through Eastern Health, with the two organisations working closely together to provide oncology services, dialysis planning and shared workforce and training initiatives.

Building on this, the business case identifies clear opportunities to deliver more care locally, including:

- **Expanded local access to specialist care**, with new and increased specialist clinics delivered at Alexandra District Health, including general medicine, geriatrics and paediatrics – reducing the need for patients to travel long distances for routine specialist review.
- **Increased low-complexity surgery services** to better utilise existing beds and theatre capacity to safely deliver more care locally.
- **A three-chair dialysis service at Alexandra District Health**, operating as part of Eastern Health’s renal hub-and-satellite model.
- **Improved access to imaging (X-ray) and diagnostic services**, addressing current service gaps that limit the ability to deliver and coordinate care locally.
- **Stronger workforce sustainability**, supported by expanded training and career pathways across rural and metropolitan settings, including access to Eastern Health training programs, commencement of an allied health graduate program from 2027, extension of learning management and scholarship programs, and opportunities for postgraduate education and specialist supervision.
- **Clearer, more integrated care pathways**, supported by unified clinical governance and, over time, shared patient information systems – making it easier for patients to move between local and metropolitan services when escalation or specialist care is required.

¹ Connecting Care for a Healthy Tomorrow. Public Facing Business Case.pdf

- **More sustainable use of shared systems and support services**, including emergency and disaster response, allowing Alexandra District Health to focus resources on frontline care while maintaining a strong local presence.

The decision follows a structured engagement process with staff, stakeholders and community members, which helped inform the business case and was carefully considered by the boards.

Feedback from this engagement highlighted strong support for sustainable local healthcare and expanded access to services, alongside the importance of protecting the strong, rural identity at Alexandra District Health, maintaining essential services and ensuring local voices continue to be heard.

Alexandra District Health Board Chair, Kim Flanagan, said importantly, the recommendation includes clear safeguards to protect local identity, leadership and community involvement.

“If approved, Alexandra District Health will retain its name, and all locally raised funds and donations will continue to be used to support services for the local community,” Mr Flanagan said.

“Local leadership will remain in place, and the Community Engagement Committee will continue to play a formal role in ensuring community perspectives inform service planning and decision-making.”

In making this recommendation, the Boards have been mindful of the recent Longwood fire and the ongoing recovery across Alexandra and surrounding district communities. The fire highlighted the value of the existing partnership, with Eastern Health providing support to Alexandra District Health during a period of heightened demand across the district. The boards agreed that formalising this partnership is an important part of supporting community health and wellbeing into the future.

Mr Flanagan said the recommendation responds to the challenges facing rural communities and smaller health services.

“Our communities experience higher rates of chronic disease and mental ill-health than the Victorian average, alongside an ageing population and higher hospital admission rates,” Mr Flanagan said.

“At the same time, access to primary and specialist care is constrained, with many local people travelling between 45 and 90 minutes for care that could be provided closer to home if local capability were strengthened.”

“Alexandra District Health’s size also limits its ability to sustainably expand services, attract and retain workforce, and invest in the systems and governance required for contemporary models of care.”

“The Board has determined that a voluntary amalgamation with Eastern Health provides the strongest platform to address these challenges, expand access to care closer to home, and protect what the community values most about Alexandra District Health.”

Eastern Health Board Chair, Eugene Arocca, said the recommendation reflects a partnership that is already delivering for patients across the catchment.

“Our organisations already work closely together, with around 40 per cent of hospital care for people living in the Alexandra catchment currently provided through Eastern Health,” Mr Arocca said.

“A voluntary amalgamation would allow services to be planned and delivered in a more coordinated way, strengthen clinical governance, and make it easier for patients to move between local and metropolitan services when specialist care or escalation is required.”

The recommendation has been provided to the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Health and the Minister for Health for consideration and approval, in line with the *Health Services Act 1988*.

“No changes will occur unless the Minister for Health approves the proposal,” Mr Flanagan said.

“In the meantime, it is business as usual. Our focus remains on delivering safe, high-quality care for our communities and continuing to work together through our existing partnership.”

More information is available at www.connectingcare.net.

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Media contact

Email: communications@easternhealth.org.au

Phone: (03) 9895 3243