

Media Release

18 November 2020

New Mobile Clinic Taking Health Care To The Streets

Canberrans in need will soon be able to have a potentially life-saving 'chat with pat' following the launch today of a new mobile health clinic which will provide medical and counselling services to Canberrans living in public housing or experiencing homelessness.

"Alcohol and drug dependence, and mental and chronic health conditions are frequently intertwined, and often result in unstable housing and homelessness" Directions Health Services CEO, Bronwyn Hendry explained. "Unfortunately, people facing these challenges often find it difficult to access services, particularly holistic services. As a result, they don't receive the treatment and help they need until they are very sick and require a hospital admission.

"This was the driver behind the establishment three years ago of our successful primary health care outreach services at Ainslie Village and Oaks Estate. Through this service, people can see a doctor, a nurse or a drug and alcohol counsellor. It works because we take health care to them. Care is provided in a safe environment by professionals they trust, supported by CAHMA peer workers who provide a barbeque and advice on harm reduction strategies.

"At the end of 2018, we began raising funds to expand this service even further through the purchase of a mobile clinic which we could take to anywhere in Canberra where there are people in need. In particular, our goal was to bring primary health care to members of our community experiencing homelessness.

"Directions Health is excited that thanks to our foundation sponsor, the John James Foundation; the amazing support of the Capital Health Network (CHN); and a Community Support grant secured with assistance from the Member for Bean, David Smith MP, we have been able to purchase and fit out our mobile clinic van. We are recruiting additional doctors, nurses and counsellors who will help provide these vital services in other locations around Canberra."

The expanded service, run utilising our new mobile clinic called 'pat' – pathways to assistance and treatment – is expected to be progressively rolled out from January 2021, with additional funding from ACT Health for three new locations and enhanced mental health care. In the meantime, the mobile clinic is providing a new, purpose-built medical facility for the residents of Ainslie Village and Oaks Estate.

"As ACT's Primary Health Network, CHN is proud to support the Directions Health outreach services in Canberra and we have seen first-hand the difference they make," CHN CEO, Megan Cahill said. "We know that homelessness puts a person at increased risk of many health problems. We've seen how taking primary health care to people in places that are safe, accessible and familiar has resulted in increased engagement and improved health outcomes. The new mobile clinic will provide additional care options to people who are at risk of poor health outcomes and we are pleased CHN could help turn this idea into reality."

"The John James Foundation didn't hesitate to throw its support behind this initiative because we could see the significant positive social impact it will have here in the ACT," Mr Joe Roff, CEO of the John James Foundation said. "We are delighted to see the 'pat' van ready to get out and provide care for Canberrans."

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This new mobile health clinic is supported by funding from the ACT PHN through the Australian Government's PHN Program and the John James Foundation.

Today's launch took place at Oaks Estate, where the Directions Health Services' outreach team visit each week.

"Vinnies continues to value the partnership with Directions Health Services through its' support of the Community Inclusion Program, specifically to our residents and broader community members of Oaks Estate. We are delighted to see the launch of this initiative as part of a shared vision for increased health and well-being across our communities," said Bernie van Wyk, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

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