

Primary Health Care in Queensland

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In 1993, the Queensland government responded to the challenges facing the Queensland health system when it released the *Queensland Primary Health Care Policy*. In the Policy, the public sector involvement in health system reform is outlined, and the vital role played by the non-government and private sectors are supported. The direction for the future delivery of health services clearly entails meeting the needs of local populations through an emphasis on community participation and development, intersectoral collaboration and co-ordination of health services. The Policy supports an improved balance between tertiary, high cost institutional care and community-based primary health care. The development and extension of community health services is recognised in the Plan as an important strategy in achieving a more balanced health system.

The policy directions outlined in the Plan are translated into practice through the *Queensland Primary Health Care Policy Implementation Plan* (1994). The Plan details specific primary health care goals, objectives, strategies, and activities for Queensland Health, which are articulated through a range of statewide programs and initiatives.

In June 1995, Queensland Health further supported primary health care implementation through the establishment of an organisational presence within its Central Office - the Primary Health Care Unit. This Unit has responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the Queensland Primary Health Care Policy within Central Office and across the 13

Health Regions, which includes responding to emerging primary health care policy issues and creating a more responsible health system. In addition, it is providing mechanisms for improved collaboration across sectors, high quality community health services, consumer advocacy, and excellence in teaching and research.

The Primary Health Care Unit is structured to reflect effective policy processes in that its two streams - policy innovation and health system infrastructure —are inextricably linked and all unit directions inform, and are informed by, outreach activities. The Unit's organisational structure mirrors the policy development process as a cycle where policy is not just made and perhaps implemented, but is adapted through continuous interaction between policy innovation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This means that in all policy development by the Unit, policy implementation is not seen as a separate category of activity, and that activity within the Unit translates primary health care strategic directions into a practical framework.

Primary health care unit initiatives

The Primary Health Care Unit is pursuing a unique path whereby the health impact of socio-economic disadvantage is being addressed simultaneously at the policy and implementation level. The Primary Health Care Information Strategy, developed by the Unit in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, will support

the implementation of Queensland Health policies and facilitate continuity of care across health sectors. The strategy demonstrates the critical role of the primary health care sector in overall client care and in decreasing unnecessary impacts on the hospital sector.

As part of a strategy to improve the collaboration and liaison between the public and private health sectors, the Unit has hosted a successful forum on *General Practice and Queensland Health: The present and the future*, and established the General Practice Liaison Council to implement the action plan generated at the forum. In addition, key primary health care organisations within the community have joined forces as the Primary Health Care Outreach Network to further primary health care in Queensland. Members include the Community Health Association Queensland, Consumers Health Advocacy, Queensland Council of Social Service, Centre for Public Health, Public Health Association Queensland, Primary Health Care Reference Centre, and Queensland Health Regions.

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Quality service provision in the primary health care sector is ensured through the unit's support for the Community Health Accreditation and Standards Program (CHASP) in Queensland. CHASP has been embraced enthusiastically and the Community Health Association Queensland provides strong leadership in improving the standard and quality of community health services across the Queensland Health Regions. In funding Consumer Health Advocacy, the Primary Health Care Unit provides a voice for the consumers of Queensland to the government. The establishment of the Primary Health Care Reference Centre by the Unit will provide teaching excellence at the graduate and postgraduate level, and contribute to the high quality research in primary health care being undertaken in the State.

Primary health care is a vigorous change agent within the Queensland health system. With the combined efforts of the public, private, non-government organisations and the community, we can be sure that we shall be able to provide health care for the people of Queensland in the setting of their choice.