

COMMUNIQUE – MEETING NO. 5: 6-7 December, 2018

The topic of this meeting of the NT Clinical Senate has been about adolescent health with subthemes of the issue of obesity in adolescents, youth friendly mental health services and engaging with young Territorians in the co-design of locally placed adolescent health services.

The Minister for Health, the Hon Natasha Fyles, attended the meeting to launch the NT Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan.

Severe obesity of adolescents is emerging as a common problem around the world. AIHW data shows that 25% of non-Aboriginal children are overweight and obese; and 30% in Aboriginal children. Children suffer poorer health including hypertension and metabolic disorders, lower self-esteem, bullying, poorer school attendance, poorer health in adulthood including obesity and cardiovascular problems and poorer employment prospects. Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus is increasingly seen at a younger age and is associated with socio-economic disadvantage

Priorities for action include community awareness, community-led design of prevention strategies and innovative approaches to youth services. Clinical principles of obesity management include ensuring a developmentally appropriate approach, support long-term behaviour change, increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviours.

Mental illness also represents a large burden of disease for young people. 50% of mental illnesses emerge before the age of 14 years, with 75% evident before the age of 24 years. Understanding development is an important basis for youth-friendly Mental Health Services. For youth in NT, the rate of serious mental illness continues to increase, particularly in remote communities. Young consumers are the “missing middle” in Australia’s health system as they are moving between the paediatric system to the general system catering for adults.



The NT Clinical Senate has made a number of recommendations to the Chief Executive in order to identify service gaps and address key issues for NT young people. These include a review of adolescent services and referral pathways, consideration of the creation of dedicated adolescent health spaces, improving access to an appropriately skilled adolescent health workforce and a whole of NT Government Action Plan to prevent and decrease obesity.