

Report

Local Health Forum

Supporting the primary care workforce

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
CO-DESIGN METHODOLOGY	4
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION.....	4
Focus areas and consultation questions	4
ONLINE SURVEY	4
Survey questions	4
Primary care health professionals.....	4
Community members.....	5
FINDINGS	6
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION.....	6
Key priorities.....	6
ONLINE SURVEY.....	6
Primary care health professionals.....	6
Community members.....	7
Key priorities for South Western Sydney	7
EVALUATION.....	8

INTRODUCTION

South Western Sydney Primary Health Network (SWSPHN) facilitates two rounds of Local Health Forums a year. Each round of forums has a different area of focus. Community members, service providers and local health professionals are invited to come together to discuss priorities, service needs and gaps within our region. Forums are held at locations across the region to better understand the unique health needs of our diverse community. Insights from the forums inform the SWSPHN needs assessment and future planning for enhanced primary care.

The goal of local health forums is to:

1. Broaden grassroots consultation in our region
2. Showcase SWSPHN programs and initiatives
3. Collect strong qualitative data to inform planning and needs assessment
4. Support other co-design projects
5. Gain a better understanding of where to invest funding

The focus of this round of forums was **supporting our primary care workforce**, concentrating on improving health outcomes for underserved and vulnerable groups in our region. SWSPHN understands the population of the entire region is growing and demand for health services is rising. The purpose of this round of consultations is to better understand the enablers and barriers which impact on the primary care workforce in South Western Sydney.

Objectives of this consultation include:

1. To understand the issues surrounding primary care workforce recruitment and retention in South Western Sydney and the longer term impact on the community
2. To understand consumer experiences with primary care including accessibility, affordability and quality of care received in South Western Sydney
3. To identify opportunities and priorities for workforce engagement, workforce development and broader workforce strategy planning in South Western Sydney

Insight from this round of consultations will assist with workforce engagement, workforce development and education, and broader workforce strategy planning.

CO-DESIGN METHODOLOGY

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

The face-to-face consultations were held at four locations between March and April in 2024:

- Holiday Inn, Warwick Farm: 14 March
- Rydges, Campbelltown: 3 April
- Mittagong RSL, Mittagong: 11 April
- Bryan Brown Theatre and Function Centre, Bankstown: 24 April

These were held in the evening to opportunistically capture a wider range of community members, service providers and health professionals who could attend. Each consultation was a two-hour session (2x 15 minute presentations, 1x 90 minute consultation) with dinner included.

Focus areas and consultation questions

There were five focus areas, incorporated into six questions asked at the forums.

Focus areas:

- Barriers and challenges
- Opportunities for improvement

Questions:

1. What are the challenges (or barriers) to accessing healthcare?
2. What does good quality care look like?
3. What has changed about the way you access or provide health services?
4. What are the gaps in primary and community health care?
5. How can we better support health professionals?
6. What are the key priorities for improving the primary care experience?

Forum structure

Presentation phase: A member from the Executive team provided an overview of SWSPHNs strategic goals, showcasing programs and initiatives aligned with delivering better access to primary health care in our region. A member from the Workforce team provided a brief deep dive into the state of the healthcare workforce in our region.

Consultation phase: Forum participants were asked a series of six questions and given time to discuss each as part of small groups facilitated by a member of the SWSPHN team.

ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was developed and then distributed online via social media, email, and via direct access at the face-to-face consultations. The survey was modified to suit two different target groups (primary care health professionals and community members). Both included standard demographic questions.

Survey questions

Primary care health professionals

1. Rate your experience working in South Western Sydney
2. What environmental factors make working in your community a positive experience?
3. What environmental factors make working in your community a negative experience?
4. What are the main challenges for primary healthcare professionals?
5. Have you participated in any of SWSPHN's professional development activities in the past 12 months?

6. What additional support and education would you like from SWSPHN?
7. Rate your experience attracting and retaining GP Registrars
8. What additional measures would improve satisfaction for GP Registrars?

Community members

1. How often do you see a GP?
2. Do you have a regular GP?
3. What is important to you when choosing a general practice?
4. Are these important factors being met by the general practice you visit?
5. What limits your ability to see a GP?
6. Will you see an alternate GP if your regular GP has a long wait time?
7. If you have an urgent medical issue, where are you most likely to go for help?
8. Rate how difficult it is to find a bulk billing GP
9. How has your experience finding a bulk billing GP changed in the past 12 months?
10. Has your experience making an appointment become easier or harder in the past 6 months?

These surveys were conducted between 1 March and 30 April 2024.

FINDINGS

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Thematic analysis was used to quantify the data gathered from community consultations. Common themes raised for each focus area were noted and key priorities were established.

There were **81 attendees** and **1,099 responses** to the questions asked.

Table 1: Top responses to each focus area, represented by region

Focus areas	Barriers and challenges	Quality care defined	Service accessibility	Needs and service gaps	Better support for health professionals	Key priorities
All local health forums	Affordability	Safe	More e-health services	Better support for patients and carers	Incentives to work in primary health care	Increased funding and resources
Bankstown	Affordability	Accessible	Changes to services	Improved affordability	GP education	Community education
Campbelltown	Affordability	Safe	More e-health services	Better support for patients and carers	Incentives to work in primary health care	Increased funding and resources
Mittagong	Affordability	Safe	More e-health services	More specialist services	Community education and health promotion	Community education
Warwick Farm	Affordability	Safe	More e-health services	Improved affordability	Incentives to work in primary health care	New or improved systems and services

Key priorities

The top priority for all four regions is **increased funding and resources**. Other key priorities include improving the systems and services which health professionals and community members currently use and improving communication and promotional activities for community members to encourage increased capacity to access care.

Some key comments from the forums included:

- “We can support health professionals by improving incentives to work in the region, also improving support for people to visit their doctor in a timely manner” – Campbelltown forum
- “We need to focus on early intervention and preventative health, ultimately reducing the burden on our GPs” – Warwick Farm forum
- “Everybody should have access to the knowledge and information they need to access healthcare and health professionals should do training to support their patients” – Mittagong forum

ONLINE SURVEY

The survey was available online during the same time as the face-to-face forums were taking place.

There was a total of **44 responses**, 21 primary care health professionals and 23 community members.

Primary care health professionals

- 10 respondents rate their experience working in South Western Sydney as a 7 or above
- Being able to drive to and park at the workplace generally makes working in our region a positive experience
- Increasing travel time to and from the workplace generally makes working in our region a negative experience
- The three biggest challenges for patients which primary care health professionals see daily include:

- Increasing financial difficulties
- Increasing wait times to see a health professional
- Low health literacy
- 47% of respondents frequently participate in SWSPHN’s professional development activities
- The most requested additional education opportunities include:
 - Womens health
 - Drug and alcohol addiction and management
 - Multidisciplinary care and diabetes
- The most requested additional opportunities to support primary healthcare staff include:
 - Specific training for practice nurses
 - Resources for referral pathways
 - More webinars

Community members

- 17% of respondents see their GP often
- 78% of respondents have a regular GP
- Availability, accessibility and affordability are the most important factors when choosing a GP
- 48% of respondents agree that their needs are being met by their GP
- The three biggest limitations to respondents ability to see a GP are
 - Wait times
 - Affordability
 - Poor accessibility to preferred practice
- Respondents are most likely to go to their regular GP for care for an urgent medical issue and will see a different GP at the same practice if the regular GP is not available
- Most respondents believe it is harder to find a bulk billing GP now than it was six months ago

Key priorities for South Western Sydney

All respondents of the survey were asked to provide additional comments if they wanted to. Primarily, comments included suggestions for priority areas, which included:

- Improving accessibility
- Improving affordability
- Improving GP retention

EVALUATION

The consultation provided an excellent opportunity to network, engage, and discuss the key priorities for our region in a welcoming and safe environment. There are several distinct priorities for improving the state of the primary care workforce in our region, as determined by the people who engaged with SWSPHN during this consultation period.

Overall, key priorities for further consideration include:

- Increasing support for primary care health professionals working in our region, ideas include:
 - Increasing specialised CPD events
 - Improving general practice support
 - Improving referral pathways for allied health
- Supporting patients to access primary health care services, through:
 - Implementing educational communications campaigns to improve health literacy
 - Improving affordability where possible
 - Improving accessibility where possible
- Improving regional directories so health professionals have a clear view of all services in the region