

Executive Summary

The Cities of Salisbury and Playford and the Town of Gawler, situated within the Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide, are facilitating a Human Services strategic planning process. A partnership of Local, State and Commonwealth Governments and the non-Government sector are contributors to this project. By November 2000 the partnership will have developed a Strategic Plan that will focus on older people, families and health development.

The aims of the project are to:

- Promote equitable and sustainable services.
- Develop a basis for well informed advocacy for families and older persons.
- Promote an integrated approach to health development across all levels of government.
- Review the role of local government in aged, family and health services in the current environment.
- Position the Northern Metropolitan Region to take advantage of any available State or Commonwealth funding.

This project was initiated at a time when

- competition in the community services sector is having significantly negative effects on service delivery, particularly human services delivery in the region;
- there has been a demonstrated decrease in the range of family programs across the region;
- there is a clearly identified absence of funds for preventative services and programs;
- tension exists as a result of funding decisions between crisis management and preventative programs;
- continued significant health issues have been identified in both the 1996 and 1999 South Australian Social Health Atlas;
- a fee for services model is being developed in aged care services;
- local government Home and Community Care (HACC) services forced to narrow the targeting of their services to higher need ends in response to a reduction or unavailability of aged care services;
- funds available are not commensurate with the demands from struggling families and a growing aged population.

Also at a time when there is growing concern at the ongoing negative social and economic indicators for significant population groups in the northern suburbs.

The Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide has been the focus of considerable study and planning over the last 15 years. Despite this work there is nothing to suggest that there has been any substantial improvement in the quality of life for many of the residents, and indeed for many, conditions have worsened. The Northern Metropolitan Councils has taken the lead in initiating this planning project in order to:

- highlight the serious and ongoing economic and social circumstances for many citizens in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide; and

- gain an effective response from the major funders of human services, that is, the State and Commonwealth Governments.

Context

The polarisation of the population in Australian cities and in particular metropolitan Adelaide is becoming increasingly apparent in the spatial form as both poverty and wealth are tending to concentrate geographically. Of similar concern is evidence that health inequalities are also widening, and again becoming increasingly apparent in the spatial form¹. The increasing spatial concentration of poverty and affluence is driving a self-perpetuating process of what is currently identified as social exclusion where certain groups and individuals in the population are becoming marginalised. These people experience a lack of power and limited opportunities for social participation; they are often trapped in a cycle of entrenched disadvantage caused by factors such as unemployment and poor education/skill levels. Spatial concentration compounds the level of disadvantage experienced and often creates a culture of welfare dependency with intergenerational effects. The exclusion and spatial concentration needs to be addressed, not only for reasons of social justice and equity, but also from a pragmatic perspective in respect to both space and image.

The Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide at June 1998 had the highest number of residents of metropolitan Adelaide 22.8 percent of the State's population and 31.2 percent of the ASD. The population in the region is increasing at a rate of almost double the rest of the State and is projected to increase by 14.1 percent between 1998 and 2011 in comparison to the State increase of 6.1 percent. The region will have parallel growth in an ageing population along with young people and young families. Salisbury and Gawler's projected population growth will be primarily within its ageing population, whereas Playfords projected growth is shown to be in all age groups. The largest number of indigenous people in metropolitan Adelaide live in the northern region, and 11.2 percent of the population in the north were identified as being born in a non-main English speaking country. People from Vietnam are the major group in the Salisbury LGA and those from Italy in the Playford LGA.

Locational disadvantage is significant in the northern region, with the unemployment rate, whilst having improved from the 1996 figure of 12.9 percent, has not recovered as well as other areas and has the highest rate of the ASD at 10.8 percent (as at June quarter 2000). There has however been significant growth in part-time employment for both men and women along with a decline in full-time employment. South Australia's social security welfare dependency ratio (1998) was 28.2 percent with Salisbury at 28.0 percent, Gawler 30.1 percent and Playford 37.8 percent. There are strong correlations in the north between education levels, participation in the workforce and the region having the highest percentage of people leaving school at age 15 years.

As a summary of the above figures the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage clearly identifies the LGA's of Salisbury and Playford as consistently across all post codes well below the national, State and ASD average. The Index confirms anecdotal and statistical evidence that significant locational disadvantage continues to have significant regression from one census (1991-1996) to the next.

¹ SA Health Commission (1996) A Social Health Atlas of South Australia 2nd edition and Public Health Information Development Unit (1999) A Social Health Atlas of Australia vol 5 South Australia.

Sections 3-5 describe issues raised by the reference groups for this project which are reinforced by current data and in the policy writing on families, older people and health. By illustrating current thinking on these topics this discussion paper shows the links between social and economic environments and their impact on the quality of life for the community in the north.

Families

In Section 3 Families it is identified that essential economic and social conditions for families to flourish are adequate income; access to good and affordable childcare and schooling; and the availability of appropriate social services including adequate housing and health services. All have and impact on family well being. Therefore the preconditions for creating a healthy environment for families and children include:

- family supportive employment conditions
- adequate family income
- supportive environments for effective parenting
- housing and regional development policy

The circumstances for a substantial number of families in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide seem not to have improved since major reports prepared in the early 1990s. There is a broad view that things have got increasingly worse over the past five or six years and that drug and alcohol abuse and mental health problems were exacerbating problems associated with poverty. Service providers highlight a substantial loss of services which is resulting in increased targeting.

There appears to be no clear direction ahead for service providers although there is great commitment to continue working with the northern community. There is a lack of policy direction for change, insufficient funding for services and increased targeting. A crisis response has prevented coordinated or integrated developmental approaches to family support, and the situation has been steadily deteriorating with a compounded worsening of the social and economic circumstances for significant numbers of northern families.

The central message conveyed by the socio-demographic data and the evidence provided through the reference group and agency reports is that the structural impacts of a changed economy and growing and prolonged unemployment are causing acute and sustained distress to a significant number of families in the region. These families face elevated risk of abuse and neglect and involvement in multiple statutory service systems. Unless there is a well planned and funded effort by all levels of government to ensure adequate supports for families, things will get worse.

The Commonwealth Government is implementing the Stronger Families and Community Strategy and the State Government provides a considerable network of services that contribute to family well-being. Together these two major levels of government funding, programming and services could develop an integrated approach to planning to develop positive and effective strategies to assist families.

Older Persons

By the year 2021 effectively one in five South Australian's will be aged and the greatest increases will be in the 85 years and above age group. The projected population increases highlights significant differences within and between regional areas, with the northern metropolitan region predicted to have the largest population increase. There has been a shift from the middle and inner suburbs to the coastal and outer suburbs. These outer suburbs tend to have decreased density as compared with inner suburbs resulting in greater isolation and decreased access to services to older individuals. Statistics also reflect a strong correlation between the percentage of persons aged 65 years and over with low incomes and the percentage of households without cars. Further adding to isolation within these communities.

The medium to long term implications of a rapidly ageing population is that a series of interconnected social and economic strategies must be explicitly developed, implemented and monitored in relation to clearly stated outcomes. Given the emphasis on ageing in one's own home/community it will be critical to address those circumstances which will encourage this to occur: the appropriateness/affordability of housing, availability of transport and connectedness to others, as well as improved coordination of services.

It can be seen from Section 4: Older People, that there are some core conditions to be created to ensure positive ageing in the northern suburbs. While **Moving Ahead** provides a foundation for regional planning for older people the Healthy Ageing project and the Commonwealth's National Ageing Strategy should also be part of the development of positive and effective strategies to assist older people in the north.

Health

South Australians as a whole enjoy a good level of health and a range of health services, but there still remain considerable inequities in both health status and access to health promoting opportunities. The health status of the Northern Metropolitan community has been the subject of considerable Commonwealth and State planning studies over the last decade. These studies and reports consistently highlight a high degree of preventable ill health in the community, with no substantial improvements. Indeed, for many, their health status has worsened.

Discussion with service providers identify that demand for health services far outstrips available supply, and that health services suffer the end result of decisions made in other sectors. The consequences of this situation, are:

- agencies narrow their eligibility criteria to manage the demand and thus increase the gaps in services;
- the quality of services provided are being compromised due to the large number of clients that must be accommodated by the current number of staff; and
- the ability to cope with these problems is affected by resource issues, both financial and staffing.

Service providers reported that one of the biggest issues they face is that the majority of clients experience multiple disadvantages. The total number of clients in this situation ultimately impacts on the overall operations of the service. Funding arrangements do not take account of these circumstances.

Key aspects of the Department of Human Service Portfolio's Strategic Plan (1999-2002) relating to health improvement, which are relevant to a Northern Metropolitan Regional Human Services Strategic Plan, include a stated commitment to improving the well-being of vulnerable population groups. The portfolio is further committed to placing a greater focus on primary care and has developed a framework statement in relation to integrated community planning.

There is also a clear commitment in the Department's Strategic Plan to better targeting and to implementation of reforms relating to housing, child protection, mental health, clinical services and planning and coordinated care. Work is continuing on the development of a Child Health Plan for the North.

In order to have gains in population health and well-being all sectors need to work together in a health promoting manner. An approach is needed which recognises that all levels of government, organisations, workplaces, schools and communities need to create the conditions for health. The complex range of interrelated factors that result in inequalities must be confronted by a partnership between the three levels of government, a strong commitment to health promotion, and provision of adequate resources to primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health care.

Framing the Strategic Plan

In framing a Strategic Plan, much of what is needed and many of the policy and program interventions for families, older people and health in the Northern Metropolitan Region do not rest solely within a human services framework. Other areas, such as adequate income and housing, transport, childcare, employment and education, will also have an impact on improving outcomes for families and older people as well as being central to good health outcomes. In particular these areas have the greatest scope for prevention and early intervention approaches and are recognised by policy makers to be desirable and potentially more cost effective.

There is recognition that to successfully address the complex needs of a socially disadvantaged community a more substantial all of government approach is required with more equal commitment from key government and local service providers and pooling of resources to significantly improve significant disadvantage.

Tackling disadvantage requires an integrated approach involving partnerships between government and non-government organisations, greater focus on community development, and better coordination between agencies in disadvantaged areas.

Certain elements are essential to an effective planning strategy, particularly where a shared commitment to common goals is required. A broad regional plan should inform and give focus to particular interventions that will impact positively on the well being and increased social and economic health of the northern metropolitan community.

A strategic plan should provide a unifying focus for shared commitment and funding across levels of government, the communities of the northern metropolitan region, businesses and community services. The role of partnerships with non-government sectors, employment and skills/training agencies, community sector, employers and business and private funders is

also critical – government can't do this on its own. Models for developing these interrelationships need to be explored and implemented.

A Long-term strategy is needed with a structured approach to policy and program development, including monitored projects, commitment to acting on the outcomes and clear exit strategies for what happens if funding is removed.

To achieve this four long-term goals have been identified

- ◆ To improve social and economic conditions.
- ◆ To improve health status.
- ◆ To improve integration and coordination of services, including services by government, non-government sector, and private and volunteers sectors.
- ◆ To develop more responsive and effective methods of delivering services.

Principles for guiding an effective strategy

Principles that will drive this strategy to include:

- **Strong Partnerships:** Strong partnerships are important for better planning and for building capacity at regional, neighbourhood and individual levels
- **Leadership:** Strong and effective leadership will be required to enable positive and effective change.
- **Sustainability:** Effective and long-term community change requires capacity building and regional neighbourhood and local level interventions that can be sustained over the long term.
- **Prevention-oriented System:** Early intervention and prevention approaches.
- **People-oriented System:** Focus of the strategy will be about placing the needs of people first and 'enhancing quality of life'.
- **Continuum of Care:** Existing community service strengths to be identified and built upon.

Proposed Strategic Directions

- ⇒ Develop partnerships across the three levels of government and the non-government sector
- ⇒ Increase partnerships within communities to improve service delivery and strengthen social supports.
- ⇒ Improve the continuum of programs and services by removing gaps and duplication, increasing integration and improving coordination of services

- ⇒ Encourage community capacity building processes and programs, which will involve local residents at the neighbourhood level.
- ⇒ Increase the community investment in prevention and the promotion of health and well-being.
- ⇒ Develop a systematic assessment of the availability of affordable and appropriate housing, and development of a collaborative housing supply across public, private and community sectors.
- ⇒ Increase income-generating opportunities to families and older persons
- ⇒ Improve retention rates of young people in secondary and tertiary education.
- ⇒ Improve the accessibility and affordability of childcare, well supported preschool programs and enterprise oriented schooling;
- ⇒ Improve the accessibility of public and community transport services

The success of the Strategic Plan depends upon all partners in the project having clear policy and program goals, identifiable and accountable outcomes, shared commitment over the longer term, and preparedness to share resources across program and government boundaries in order to achieve improved outcomes for northern residents.

The development of an effective strategy for the Northern Metropolitan Region of Adelaide depends upon:

- gaining agreement from the key stakeholders about the problems and the goals for improvement,
- identifying and agreeing a set of interventions on which all key stakeholders will work over the next 5 years,
- gaining commitment in terms of time and funds for these interventions on the basis of negotiated outcomes,
- setting clear indicators of quality of life improvement for families and children in the north and regularly evaluating progress,
- agreeing a forum of key stakeholders for negotiating arrangements for these initiatives and with regular review dates,
- including a community capacity building process for each intervention and set an indicator for achievement of this, and
- identifying a strong and committed chair of the forum, preferably from the north.