



MEDIA RELEASE

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New model for medical centres

Geeveston and Dover medical centres will merge to a one practice two sites model to improve the current operations of the service.

The new name for the two centres will be Huon Valley Medical Services to maintain consistency with other council sites.

Acting Mayor said the merge offers greater ability to share and move resources seamlessly across both locations and provides opportunities for information and communications technology (ICT) efficiencies that do not currently exist.

“I want to reassure everyone that the ownership of the practices has not changed. We will continue to operate the services in both towns.”

The new model is a result of the strategic review of the medical centres that happened in late 2021. The review considered the future structure and service delivery of medical services in Dover and Geeveston as well as improvements to the current operations.

“With the resignation of general practitioners (GPs), an ageing workforce, and the population growth of the Huon Valley a strategic review was necessary to support the improvement of financial and service viability,” Acting Mayor Doyle said.

One of the other major recommendations from the strategic review was to focus on reducing bulk billing rates by returning to a mixed billing practice. The general principle of a mixed billing practice is that patients who can afford to pay for their care are paying a co-payment.

“The extremely high bulk billing rates in the practices are a risk to the financial sustainability of the practices. Both practices have been actively working to increase the level of patient co-payment and reduce the bulk billing rates since November 2021.

“This resulted in the rates reducing slightly, however further improvements are needed.



“Achieving a better co-payment billing mix supports the financial sustainability of the practices, supporting the daily operational costs of running a quality general practice and is in line with all other practices across Australia.

“A practice that predominantly bulk bills negatively impacts the recruitment of future general practitioners as a result of the lower potential income generation. Other medical practices in the Huon Valley have had to review their billing policies for similar reasons.

“It should be noted the bulk billing of patients is at the discretion of the GP and patients will be encouraged to speak to their GP if they have concerns about being able to afford a co-payment.”

Acting Mayor Doyle said there are several risks in operating medical services that are not unique to the Huon Valley.

“The inability to attract and retain doctors as well as the higher bulk billing rates are having an impact on regional practices throughout Australia with many surgeries having to close.

“Success or failure in rural general practice is measured by one key performance indicator: a sustainable GP Workforce. The predominant business priority for any rural practice is to provide an attractive workplace environment that supports the attraction and retention of GPs to deliver high quality care.

“This is what we are aiming for by making these changes.

“The costs involved in the change of name will be minimal and will involve a new domain name and updated stationery. This is included within the budget as a component of the ICT transition. Costs for updated signage will be limited and will be funded from the current budget.”

The changes will come into effect from Monday 3 October 2022.

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