

Choices to be expanded to four new hospital sites

17 May 2021

- **The Choices program will be expanded to four metropolitan Perth hospitals, including Joondalup Health Campus, St John of God Midland, Peel Health Campus and Armadale Health Campus.**
- **Choices connects vulnerable people at risk of poor health outcomes with culturally sensitive social and mental health support upon discharge from hospital emergency departments.**
- **Ruah Community Services has been awarded the contract to establish and run the program at the new locations.**

The Choices program will be expanded to four metropolitan Perth hospitals, including Joondalup Health Campus, St John of God Midland, Peel Health Campus and Armadale Health Campus.

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA), the operator of the three Primary Health Networks across Western Australia, awarded the contract to Ruah following an open tender procurement process.

The first program of its kind in Western Australia, Choices connects vulnerable people at risk of poor health outcomes with culturally sensitive social and mental health support upon discharge from hospital emergency departments.

Choices was developed in response to substantial evidence of the over-representation of people with multiple health and social needs presenting to emergency departments.

Since launching in late 2017, the Choices program has used peer and case workers to connect with thousands of people and offer supportive intervention through drawing on their lived experience in similar situations. The service provides care coordination and supports people to access and remain connected to primary healthcare services in the community.

The Choices program is expected to launch at the new hospital locations in the 21/22 financial year.

This activity has been made possible through funding provided by the Australian Government's *Community Health and Hospitals Program*.

Comments attributed to WA Primary Health Alliance General Manager Commissioned Services, Mark Cockayne:

“Choices is a unique program that supports clients to address their underlying mental health and social issues to keep them out of hospital. We know that care centered around individual needs and preferences helps those at risk of poor health outcomes establish a safe connection back into the community.

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“The expansion of the Choices program to four additional metropolitan Perth hospitals is a great opportunity for Ruah to build on the work they have done with the Choices pilot and incorporate learnings into the establishment of the new locations.”

Comments attributed to Ruah Chief Executive Officer, Debra Zanella:

“I’m delighted to see the Choices program expanding to Armadale, Joondalup, Midland and Peel.

“We know that social isolation, harmful substance use, family breakdown, homelessness, trauma and domestic violence are among the factors that contribute to frequent emergency department presentations. Choices is premised on identifying and addressing these underlying and inter-related needs and is a great example of how peer engagement, individualised support and flexibility can help those at risk of poor health outcomes in our community.

“With funding from WA Primary Health Alliance, Choices has been operating at Royal Perth Hospital and Armadale Health campus for a number of years, and the independent evaluation by UWA has demonstrated the positive impact the program is having.”

Comments attributed to Federal Member for Hasluck, Hon Ken Wyatt AM:

“I’m delighted the Choices program will soon be established at four additional metropolitan hospitals thanks to funding from the Australian Government’s *Community Health and Hospitals Program*.

“Choices has made a real difference to the lives of many people, offering support and guidance to those in crisis and helping them navigate primary healthcare and social support services.”

Marcus’s story

Marcus, a man in his mid-twenties with a history of anxiety and depression, lacked family or community supports. Within a three-day period, his partner left him, and he lost his job. This led to a sudden increase in ED presentations and hospital admissions.

Choices provided him with immediate relief through shopping vouchers, liaising with Centrelink, advocating on his behalf to a property agency to wipe rent arrears, as well as providing emotional support. In 2018, Marcus presented at ED 11 times and spent 15 days in hospital, equating to a cost of \$52,853.

Since engagement with Choices, he has not attended hospital. Marcus was inspired by the Choices Peer Community Workers, has started a Certificate IV in Mental Health and Peer Work, has improved his diet and is focusing on self-care. He is making new friends who provide him with support.

ENDS

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