

# TRANSITIONING TO YOUNG ADULT CARE:

## WHY WE NEED TO GET IT RIGHT



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*While much of our focus for the past 12 months has been on COVID-19, our work as clinicians outside of this space has also continued.*

Clinicians continued to care for patients with chronic conditions, emergency departments and general practice have remained busy with non-COVID patients, as have outpatients and every area of healthcare. And this has been important—it's critical people who needed care and treatment to continue seeking it and keep in touch with their health care team.

No doubt for patients requiring treatment in a COVID environment, the experience has been vastly different to what they have been used to – navigating a different setting, a new set of rules, and perhaps an unfamiliar space. It's been tough on patients and health care providers alike.

Navigating a whole new environment, let alone during a pandemic, is something our young people face when they transition from paediatric patient to young adult patient in the adult health care system. They move from the familiar surrounds of the children's ward or hospital and their established relationships with their health care team, to a whole new world.

Imagine, if you will, what that must be like? Pretty tough most of us would say, but it wasn't until I heard the incredibly powerful and very raw personal stories from a number of young people that I realised just how tough it can be.

Too often, our young patients fall through the gaps during their transition into the adult health care system, having a detrimental impact on their health.

In amongst the Senate's involvement in Queensland Health's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we took time out to focus on how we can do better when it comes to supporting access to care for

our young people as well as supporting their transition from paediatric to adult care. The online meeting, *Adolescent to Young Adult Care: Doing Better*, was attended by more than 150 clinicians, system managers, families and young health care consumers.

Our keynote speaker Professor Susan Sawyer, President of the International Association for Adolescent Health, stressed the importance of investing in the health and wellbeing of our young people for their future and for future generations.

'This generation of adolescents can transform all our futures; there is no greater priority in global health than ensuring they have the resources to do so.' Patton GC, Santelli JS, Sawyer SM et al, 2016.

But how do we get it right and do better for these amazing young people?

Firstly, we need to recognise that the needs of adolescents and young adults (those aged 10-24 years) are unique. Our young consumers and the clinicians who work in this space tell us that we must listen to our young people and their families and learn from their experiences.

We must reach out to our consumers and offer help (not wait for them to come to us) and involve consumers in every step of the process. It has to be a coordinated and planned team approach – no one should have to do this alone.

A number of great initiatives in Queensland are paving the way for better transition for our young people. A program in Townsville is supporting young people with diabetes to prepare for the journey into the adult health care system. And our colleagues at the

Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service (GCHHS) are taking a multi-disciplinary, multi-pronged approach to help our young people move from the familiar surrounds of the paediatric ward to the unfamiliar adult system. The Mater Health Service in Brisbane and GCHHS are the only sites in Queensland accredited by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians for adolescent and young adult medicine specialty training. Queensland is fortunate to have local experts and champions Dr Simon Denny (Chair of the RACP Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine committee), Dr Kerri-Lyn Webb (Chair of the Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network) and Dr Cam Bennett (Chair of the Transitional Care working group) who are passionately progressing these issues.

The Senate will release a broad range of recommendations – from the system level through to individual Hospital and Health Services – to help improve the care provided to adolescents, as well as their transition to young adult care.

They range from the creation of a youth consumer health panel, the appointment of clinical champions to support young people and their families as they transition, and the development of a clinical framework to support clinicians. The recommendations will be released soon.

I am incredibly grateful to have been involved in this meeting. Transition is such an important thing for us to get right for the lives of young people and their families. We can't let them down.