

Northern Health

GP Newsletter

August 2020



Northern Health COVID-19

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The second wave of this pandemic dominating 2020 has brought with it additional challenges. Many sectors are suffering and the health and human services sector is being stretched to new limits.



With this weight on our shoulders we are finding new ways to connect across the northern Melbourne catchment. We are rapidly creating new ways of supporting our community. An example of this is the Community Watch Partnership Project lead by the Hume Whittlesea Primary Care Partnership and DPV Community Health. The Project is supported by an exciting partnership of diverse and committed organisations from Hume and Whittlesea with a shared interest to promote wellbeing amongst vulnerable members of the community impacted by COVID-19. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.hwpcp.org.au/community-watch-program/>

Simultaneously, here at Northern Health, we have launched our new strategic plan ([Northern Health Strategic Plan 2020-24](#)), which sets our vision for a *healthier community, making a difference for every person, every day*.

Our values, highlighted in this Plan, will be what really makes a difference: *Safe, Kind, and Together*. Working *Together* with our primary care colleagues, as a critical foundation of our health system, is what will really make the difference for northern Melbourne. It's about how we come together in partnership across the whole northern catchment, as an integrated care system for our community.

We thank you for your valued efforts and look forward to continuing to work together with you in the coming months as we work through this challenging year.

Ms Briana Baass FCHSM MAICD
PARTNERSHIPS | NORTHERN HEALTH

Northern Hospital
185 Cooper Street
Epping Vic 3076

Broadmeadows Hospital
35 Johnstone Street
Broadmeadows Vic 3047

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Bundoora Vic 3083

Craigieburn Centre
274-304 Craigieburn Road
Craigieburn Vic 3064

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Northern Health Specialist Clinics COVID-19 Changes

Thank you for your patience over the last few months as Northern Health adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you are aware, metropolitan Melbourne is current in the midst of a surge in COVID-19 cases with the northern suburbs being one of the key affected areas. Northern Health has been at the forefront of managing this current pandemic surge including supporting large numbers of patients with COVID-19 as well as supporting our residential aged care facilities (RACF) in our region, including rapidly opening up additional beds in our hospital.

To support this rapid response, as well as ensuring sufficient staff to run our services, we have reduced our specialist clinic capacity by approximately 50% to free clinical staff who will be redeployed to assist managing the COVID impacts. This aligns with the reduction also sought in elective surgical activity.

For this reason, we have implemented the following temporary changes (until the end of September 2020):

- **Fact to face appointments** will be limited to critical urgent cases, where clinical care cannot be provided via Telehealth. The remaining appointments will be performed via Telehealth (predominantly by telephone).
- **Telehealth appointments** will be reduced by 50% with only CAT 1 and urgent CAT 2 patients being seen during the pandemic period.
- Due to social distancing restrictions, **no accompanying visitors** are allowed for outpatient physically attending clinics. Exemptions may be made on compassionate grounds after discussion with the Nurse Unit Manager.
- Our specialist clinics team continue practices to **reduce infection risk for our patients** with regular and vigorous deep cleaning of our specialist clinic rooms as well as ushers to ensure adequate social distancing in clinics.

We understand that these changes may impact on your practice and patients in your care. Northern Health remains committed to supporting you and our community during this difficult period. If you have specific patient concerns or need to urgently refer a patient, please contact the relevant specialty registrar through the Northern Health switchboard on 8405 8000. For other issues, please contact NUM of specialist clinics.

Thank you for your understanding during these challenging times and we will continue to keep you updated as we develop our new post pandemic Future State for specialist clinics.

Dr Prahlad Ho Divisional Director –Medical
Cancer Services and
Specialist Clinics

Ms Maria Tucker Divisional Director - Nursing
Cancer Services and
Specialist Clinics

Dr John Ferguson Chief Medical Officer
Corporate

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Haematology Specialist Clinic changes during COVID-19

As you are well aware, Northern Health is at the forefront of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, including caring for a large number of COVID-19 positive patients as well as providing residential in-reach services to affected aged care homes. In order to support these increased demands, we have had to reduce our outpatient service by 50% with the focus on servicing urgent CAT 1 and high priority CAT 2 referrals. For this reason, Clinical Haematology will unfortunately not be able to offer clinic appointments for routine haematology referrals until the end of September 2020.

We recognise that these changes may significantly impact upon your service. Hence, we have developed an advice hotline to support you and your patients throughout this pandemic period.

Please utilise the below methods to contact us:

Haematology GP advice hotline – 8405 2596

Available from **9.30 am – 3.30 pm (Monday – Friday)** through our laboratory haematology team at Northern Pathology Victoria.

For urgent queries outside these hours, please contact the Clinical Haematology Registrar via Northern Health switchboard on 8405 8000

The above hotline service will be in operation from now to **30 September 2020**.

Thank you for your understanding and ongoing support during this difficult time.

Dr Teresa Leung
Head of Clinical Haematology

Heart Failure Specialist Clinic

Due to the current COVID-19 environment, Northern Health is reducing the number of heart failure consultations, therefore your heart failure patients are likely to encounter a significant wait for their heart failure cardiologist consultation.

Northern Health aim to support you to manage these complex patients in general practice. Should you require any advice:

Contact

Fiona Miller

Heart Failure Liaison Nurse

GP and PN education program “Heart Failure in the North”, Improving Heart Failure Management in General Practice

P: 0437 853 857 E: Fiona.miller2@nh.org.au

All enquiries will be addressed as quickly as possible to assist with ongoing management.

Hours: Monday -Friday 8.30am - 5.00pm

Upcoming Heart Failure Webinars:

August 25, 7.00pm: Heart Failure and Multifactorial Shortness of Breath: The role of plasma peptide testing.

September 15, 7.00pm: An approach to Syncope, Arrhythmias and Heart Failure

Register: <https://bit.ly/NH-4Aug-CPD>

Hospital Admissions Risk Program (HARP)

Hospital Admission Risk Program (HARP) provides services to people with chronic diseases and complex needs who are at high risk of admission to hospital. The program is a free home visiting service that provides short term care coordination and chronic disease management and education in the community. The multidisciplinary team comprises of nurse specialists in aged care, heart failure, dementia and diabetes, as well as medical specialists, a health coach and allied health practitioners covering physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, dietetics and psychology. The goal of HARP is to reduce avoidable hospital admissions and improve quality of life by helping people to better understand and manage their chronic conditions and reach their healthcare goals.

Consider a referral to HARP if a person residing in the Northern Health catchment has been admitted to hospital within the last 12 months and is at high risk of re-presentation due to issues regarding daily living and/or chronic disease management.

Issues may include self-care deficit, lack of social supports, carer stress, poor health literacy, limited understanding of chronic diseases, poor adherence to medication, and or limited capacity for speciality follow-up. Exclusion criteria: single discipline referral, resides in residential care or acute psychiatric illness (please refer to community mental health team).

To refer to the Northern Health HARP program please contact forward referral to:

E eReferral [see more information](#)

T 9495 3443 (press option 1)

F 8405 8616

E Community.Access.Helpdesk@nh.org.au

I [Northern Health webpage link](#)

Countering COVID-19 with kindness: Community Monitoring Program



Kindness is a key value of Northern Health, as is presented in our [Northern Health Strategic Plan 2020-24](#). It is also central to our response to the pandemic and the Northern Health COVID-19 Positive Community Monitoring Program.

The program is a telephone-based service providing both an imaginative and compassionate response for people that test positive for COVID-19 at any of our testing sites. The program operates from 8 am to 5 pm, seven days a week, targeting patients with mild disease symptoms that can be managed at home.

Patients at risk in the COVID-19 Positive Community Monitoring Program are closely monitored with daily phone calls. They are also provided with a hotline to contact the monitoring team for further support, guidance and medical advice during business hours.

The intention is to stay in contact by phone or SMS during the first 10-12 days of symptoms. Some people need and want daily contact and others prefer SMS or less frequent contact. We also support patients discharged home and diagnosed with COVID-19 from the Fever Clinic.

The team has also assisted patients to access food in the community and obtain emergency food supplies and masks.

The Northern Health COVID-19 Positive Community Monitoring Program reflects our key value – Kind.

eReferral – Axe the Fax

Northern Health switches to electronic Healthlinks for GP Referrals to Specialist Clinics

Northern Health is pleased to announce that, after a highly successful 2 year trial with HealthLink, their Specialist Clinics have switched to HealthLink SmartForms as the standard platform for accepting GP referrals.

“Our specialist outpatient clinics receive hundreds of referrals every day,” says Chrissy Nicolaidis, Operations Manager.

“Over 200 GPs from more than 130 general practices in the Northern Health catchment are regularly transmitting referrals from their desktop to our specialist clinics, completely eliminating the need to print off and fax.”

HealthLink SmartForms are widely used across Victoria and are available for GPs using Medical Director, Best Practice and Genie software. The electronic transmission has been proven to be highly reliable compared to fax. The key benefits GPs have cited include:

Immediate confirmation of a successful transmission

Once a GP clicks SEND on the HealthLink SmartForm, a notification appears on the screen to let the GP know the referral was successfully transmitted, a significantly quicker turnaround time to fax transmissions.

Easy-to-use SmartForm

GPs are guided step-by-step through the form to ensure key content is included, which helps them meet (and exceed) the minimum requirements of DHHS’s new [Statewide Referral Criteria](#). This in turn improves their chances of not having a referral stall

while waiting for additional information, or even worse, having their referral rejected.

Rapid triage leading to quicker appointment scheduling

As electronic referrals are transmitted in real time, GPs who use HealthLink SmartForms are facilitating quicker triage by Northern Health Specialist Clinics, meaning patients can be contacted for appointments sooner.

“Unfortunately, we are still seeing some GPs sending referrals by fax” says Chris Daniel, GP Support at Northern Health Specialist Clinics. “Fax transmission is highly unreliable and we have seen many instances where we have received pages of a referral that are blank or unreadable. The referrals are missing critical clinical content originally included by the GP. With different fax configurations and telephony gateways making the problem more complex, GPs are now in the enviable position of avoiding all this by adopting a technology that is already at their fingertips - sending electronic referrals directly from their desktop.”

Fax referrals will still be available for the 10% of general practices which are unable to use HealthLink SmartForms.

For more information about how you can send your patients to Northern Health Specialist Clinics using HealthLink SmartForms, please contact Christopher Daniel, GP Support at Northern Health Specialist Clinics on 0400 449 922 or email Christopher.Daniel@nh.org.au

Go to Northern Health website for more referral information <https://www.nh.org.au/referrals>



Hospital Without Walls

The Hospital Without Walls Division at Northern Health brings together the Community Services that focus on care coordination for eligible patients under a variety of chiefly DHHS funding streams, including HARP (Hospital at Risk Program) and Acute to Community, and the community based therapies including Post Acute Care and Hospital in the Home.

Two new initiatives are currently being developed under Hospital Without Walls at Northern Health: Patient Watch and the COVID Community Monitoring Program.

Patient Watch has been developed in response to the recognition that it is possible to identify in advance the small number of patients who can be predicted to make extensive use of acute health care services in the subsequent twelve months. Worldwide this group of patients represent the 2% of patients who are generate 25% of acute healthcare costs. Patient Watch seeks to provide a support service to monitor these patients needs and to anticipate and respond when they are at increased risk of presentation to the Emergency Department and admission to hospital.

The model of care is holistic in intent, it consists of Telecare Navigators who call and monitor the patients and Health Coaches who can assist patients with having their needs met closer to

home. The focus is on building resilience, reducing vulnerability and seeking to avoid the over-medicalisation of the patient's existence. The patients remain under the care of their GP, who is the conductor of the orchestra.

The COVID Community Monitoring Program has been put in place in response to the COVID19 pandemic. It involves providing a risk stratified service to monitor persons who have tested positive to COVID 19 and who must therefore self-isolate. It aims to monitor the patient's clinical condition for signs of deterioration and also to ensure that any social service needs are identified and met. In the event of deterioration, a call is made to Ambulance Victoria. The service has been put in place very quickly. Over 450 persons have been monitored during the first twelve days of operation. The service runs from 8:30 to 5:00PM seven days per week, and is staffed by a team of experienced health professionals from a diverse range of backgrounds. Better links with General Practice and other community service providers are being developed as the service stabilises.

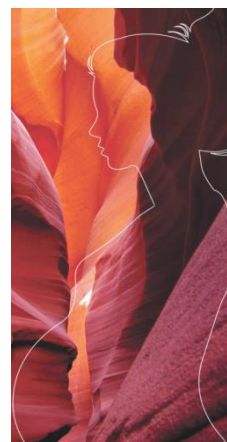
Don Campbell
Medical Director-
Hospital Without Walls
Northern Health

New Shared Maternity Care Guidelines

The Shared Maternity Care guidelines provide shared maternity care affiliates with concise, up-to-date guidelines on the provision of shared maternity care at the hospitals of the Shared Maternity Care Collaborative; Northern Health, Sunshine Hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital, Sandringham Hospital, Mercy Hospital for Women and Werribee Mercy Hospital. They also include information on antenatal care and hospital and community supports for women and health care providers.

The 2015 Guidelines are currently under review and we anticipate an updated version will be available soon.

If you are interested in becoming a shared maternity care affiliate, please visit [our website](#) for more information, including details on how to apply.



Northern Health GP Advisory Group

As part of Northern Health's 2020 strategic plan, we have a commitment to create healthier communities through active partnership with our community and other service providers for out of hospital supports.

General Practitioners play a key role in providing care for our community and with the realisation that we need to strengthen our relationship with our local GPs, we set out to establish a GP Advisory Group for Northern Health.

This group through the Chief Medical Officer, Dr John Ferguson (who was a GP himself previously), is able to advise the organisation on key issues affecting the interface between acute and primary care.

Our future vision, with the advice and support of this group, is to:

- Establish a dedicated GP Liaison Unit to support Karen Overall, who is our Primary Care Liaison Officer (PCLO), to assist our local GPs.
- Provide regular education sessions presented by our Medical Specialists that is open to all GPs, and practice nurses where applicable.
- Further enhance and promote a GP training scheme for doctors in training at Northern Health.
- Facilitate opportunities for GPs with special interests to gain accreditation through the hospital for a variety of services.
- Enhance our Shared Care service for GPs with special interests, for example, in Antenatal Care.

Northern Health hosted the inaugural meeting of the advisory group in May this year with 6 local GPs in attendance. We would like to thank the GPs for their valuable input.

Our next online meeting will be on **August 26th 12.30 to 1.30pm.**

Should you be interested in joining this group, or have an interest in becoming involved in a variety of projects that Northern Health is currently undertaking involving partnership with our community providers, then please **contact Karen Overall via email: primarycareliaison@nh.org.au**

Dr Abi Arulanandarajah
Medical Admin Registrar
Northern Health

Our Vision:

A healthier community, making a difference for every person, every day.

Our Values:



HealthPathways Melbourne online resource provides GPs with localised best-practice information to help assess, manage and refer patient pathways.

HealthPathways Melbourne has comprehensive regular updates for the [COVID-19](#) pathways, including:

[Practice Management](#)

[Assessment and Management](#)

[Referrals and Referral Advice](#)

[MBS Items](#)

[Impact on Local Services](#)

[General COVID-19 information](#)

The pathways are developed and maintained by local GPs, in consultation with specialists and other health practitioners, to best reflect local expertise and experience.

How to access HealthPathways Melbourne:

<https://melbourne.healthpathways.org.au>

Health professionals in Melbourne's north western or eastern region, can [request access here](#) or by contact the HealthPathways Melbourne team via info@healthpathwaysmelbourne.org.au

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Please note that your privacy is assured. Your details will not be shared and only used by the Northern Health Primary Care Liaison Unit

Name: _____ Email: _____

Practice: _____ Contact Number: _____

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I agree to receive the newsletter for my practice via email