



Sustainable Health WA Review

Email: SHR@health.wa.gov.au

Submission

Your Question:

In the context of the Sustainable Health Review Terms of Reference listed below, what is needed to develop a more sustainable, patient centred health system in WA?

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a late submission on this important subject.

This joint submission will address the above question with a focus on two of the Terms of Reference as well as the notion of “sustainable health”.

Background

Our community networks promote a healthy natural environment, healthy public green spaces, the protection of Tree Benefits and freedom from exposure to environmental toxins such as pesticides. The use of the word “sustainable” is often associated with environmental best practice and the health and well-being of communities, pets and wildlife.

The sustainability of the Health system, in view of the many services that it provides to patients and the increasing level of care and financial costs to the community, is also largely dependent on the health and well-being of the community and the resilience of the individual patient to achieve improved health outcomes when care is provided.

Current statistics tell us that one in two Australians will develop cancer by the age of 85. Alarming, the Leukaemia Foundation advises: “Australia has one of the highest incidences of childhood cancer worldwide. One in 500 Australian children will develop a cancer before 15 years of age – that’s 600 Australian children diagnosed every year. Childhood cancer is the single greatest cause of death from disease in Australian children, with three children losing their lives to cancer every week. [week.http://childcancerresearch.com.au/](http://childcancerresearch.com.au/)”

How we are sabotaging our children’s health and future

To this day, still ignoring international lawsuits against Monsanto and other manufacturers and the raging controversy in the EU Parliament and America over the manufacturer’s false and misleading claims about the safety of the weed killer, Glyphosate, with known scientific links to Parkinsons, birth defects and various cancers

including Non Hodgkins Lymphoma, this cancer causing product is available for sale and continues to be used in private gardens as well as public verges. Local and state managers of public land as well as school gardening contractors continue to apply this harmful weed killer in areas where children play. Recent reports in the Post Newspaper and a letter to the editor in the Fremantle Herald, yet again raise concerns about sick and dead dogs following visits to sprayed public areas.

The importance of contact with nature to the developing child in a shrinking natural Environment has been well researched. Disturbingly, however, the efforts of many parents to address childhood obesity, cultural autism and even childhood depression that have been associated with “nature deficit disorder” - ***Last Child in the Woods*** by Richard Louv, are sabotaged by loss of public green spaces, reduced private gardens and the relentless spraying of parkland, playgrounds, bush reserves, footpaths and roadsides with a cocktail of pesticides that are scheduled “poisons”.

Lack of adequate media coverage and misleading reporting, particularly in local newspapers, trivialize the genuine community concerns about the adverse effects of disappearing urban trees and the widespread application of known harmful pesticides.

Terms of Reference - 1

The mix of services provided across the system, *including gaps in service provision*, sub-acute, step-down, community and other out-of-hospital services across WA to ***deliver care in the most appropriate setting and to maximise health outcomes and value to the public;***

The importance of nature conservation to good health

There is a strongly held view that WA Health is lacking vision beyond the provision of hospital and medical services and infrastructure, often ignoring the importance of nature conservation to the health and well-being of the individual, the broader community as well as the hospital community. This was evidenced over recent times when the therapeutic gardens and Monash bushland were destroyed during the development of the new children’s hospital and Ronald McDonald House. Local residents protested and patients at Crawford Lodge were disturbed at the loss of a precious piece of urban bushland and green buffer zone that had provided relief in an area of high vehicular traffic with associated visual, noise and air pollution.

In light of scientific evidence that even sitting in a room with a view of nature promotes well-being and recovery time, we look forward to a state **Model Tree Policy** and **Tree Protection Laws** that will ensure green buffer zones and a safe urban canopy in hospital and medical centre grounds as well as all urban areas. There is an expectation, however, that WA Health authorities would acknowledge and act on the importance of nature conservation to Sustainable Health.

Conflicted Role of WA Health as State Pesticide Regulator

There is a strongly held view that the WA Health is failing in its duty of care to the community by condoning and even promoting the widespread application on public land of pesticides that are known or suspected carcinogens, foetotoxins, neurotoxins and endocrine disruptors. The Californian Department of Health, Pesticide Emergencies, clearly lists the “Flu-like” Symptoms of Pesticide Illness.

In WA most periods of fine weather provide an opportunity for local and state managers of public spaces to spray pesticides, either through boom spray broadacre applications, quadbikes on footpaths or backpacks and hand held hoses.

The spraying of pesticides such as herbicides in parkland, playgrounds, footpaths, river foreshores, bushlands, wetlands, school grounds, medians and roadsides is a controversial practice that is known to pollute and cause harm to any exposed person, pet or wildlife, as well as trees. There is evidence that Western Australians have been exposed to pesticides causing foetal abnormalities, birth defects, cancers, neurological and autoimmune diseases due to decades of pesticide spraying practices in the management of public land. The ABC Four Corners programme, ***Chemical Time Bomb***, by Janine Cohen, 2013 exposed the tragedy over many years of serious harm to young indigenous APB weeders in the Kimberleys.

There is no co-ordinated complaints mechanism between the three tiers of government. Local and state Health authorities shirk their responsibility with the mantra that pesticides are registered for use by the federal Regulator and their application is lawful, regardless of complaints and scientific evidence of harm.

Lack of confidence in WA Health to act in the best interests of the broader community by preventing harm from widely used environmental toxins such as pesticides, is a serious gap in the service provided. We look forward to the Sustainable Health WA Review addressing this gap to ***maximise health outcomes and value to the public***.

There have been numerous reports of poisoned trees, people, pets and wildlife over decades.

Sustainable Health WA must question WA Health’s conflicted role as protector of public health and Pesticide Regulator that tacitly approves the use on WA’s public spaces of a cocktail of harmful pesticides (agricultural poisons) that are generally applied without the 300-500 metre buffer zones that apply to agricultural businesses near residential areas.

In order to “maximize health outcomes and provide value to the public”, WA Health authorities should promptly acknowledge and act on reports of harm from exposure to pesticides, including: Pesticide Illness with Flu-like symptoms, cancers such as endocrine cancers, breast cancer, prostate cancer, childhood brain tumours and Non

Hodgkins Lymphoma as well as autoimmune diseases and neurological diseases such as Parkinsons and MS. In WA and nationally there is a disturbing absence of routine testing of **blood, breast milk** and **urine** for exposure to environmental toxins such as widely used herbicides and insecticides. We are lagging behind international best practice. There is also a **disturbing absence of routine testing of soil, foliage and water** for levels of commonly used herbicides and other pesticides with links to serious harm.

Terms of Reference - 2

The key enablers of new efficiencies and change, including, **research**, productivity, teaching and training, **culture**, leadership development, procurement and improved performance monitoring;

Acknowledgement of the entrenched WA culture of resistance, particularly at the Local Government level, to independent scientific research and medical practitioners' reports such as the ***Cancer and Non Cancer Health Effects of Pesticides*** by the Canadian College of Family, is necessary to enable change.

Terms of Reference - 3

Any further opportunities concerning patient centred service delivery and the sustainability of the WA Health system

Sustainability of WA Health infrastructure and services in the absence of sustainable community and patient health and well-being is untenable. Opportunities exist for change but there needs to be a cultural shift from resistance to alternative practices that mitigate the risks to the natural environment upon which we all depend for our health and well-being.

A cultural shift is necessary from the notion that trees, weeds and wildlife are expendable or pose a serious threat to infrastructure development, maintenance and pest management. **The entrenched chemical weeding strategies are of great concern.** Such a cultural shift would better protect community and patient health and well-being, as well as reduce the burgeoning health costs due to environmental causes of ill health. Further points to be considered:

- The Pesticide Advisory Committee – a secret committee that must be opened up to civil society stakeholder engagement.
- The advice from the DoH to the public in relation to adverse impacts and pesticide complaints has been ineffective and has failed to protect the health of children especially and the public in WA from the regular and increasing imposed exposures to pesticides in the urban environment.
- The DoH has no framework for documentation or a database for pesticide complaints and adverse impacts. The only process is held by the APVMA with a minimum 12 months turn around for investigation and reporting outcome. This is not a process

that can respond to the needs of the WA public in any notion of real time or responsive and preventative outcomes.

- The Pesticides Safety Act is deficient to protect the WA public and environment from the increasing imposed and unavoidable exposures to pesticides in the urban environment.
- DoH allows pesticides to be used in high risk areas like schools and day care centres, that pose significant health and environmental risks.

Sustainable Health WA cannot afford to ignore the risk of harm to the community and individual patients from ongoing exposure to pesticides, the loss of clean, green spaces and tree benefits. We are dependent on the health of our natural environment with which our health is inextricably linked. WA Health cannot be “sustainable” without prevention of harm as a priority.

The Pesticide Action Group of Western Australia is the promoter of a **Change.org Petition to stop the spraying of pesticides on hard surfaces and where children play:**

<https://www.change.org/p/western-australian-minister-for-health-protect-our-children-s-health-from-pesticides-on-our-streets-parks-and-playgrounds>

We continue to call for a **Royal Commission into the Use of Pesticides and Harm to Public Health** (Federal Petition 833/1300) [file:///C:/Users/Jones/Downloads/833-1300r%20\(19\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Jones/Downloads/833-1300r%20(19).pdf)

Alex Jones

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Alex Jones'.

Co chair

Pesticide Action Group WA

Save Our Trees WA

PO Box 474 Nedlands WA 6009

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Monday, 30th October 2017