

MEDIA RELEASE

Improving care for cancer patients

1 November 2018

Murray PHN has been funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to investigate the gaps in cancer survivorship care and identify ways to improve services across the Campaspe, Loddon and Southern Mallee regions.

The project is working to gather local information in partnership with services including: Kerang District Health Services, Boort District Health Services, Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership, Swan Hill District Health Services, Bendigo Health Services, Echuca Regional Health and Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Services.

Murray PHN CEO Matt Jones pointed to healthcare disparities between regional and metropolitan areas.

“People living in the bush have greater challenges in accessing healthcare,” he said. “Longer distances to travel and the lack of public transport, specialists and support groups are some of the factors that can contribute to people experiencing lower health outcomes.

“With improved cancer treatments, many people are living longer, and local survivorship programs have an important role to play.”

Rob Blum, Director of Medical Oncology at the Bendigo Cancer Centre, describes survivorship as including issues related to the ability to get health care and follow-up treatment, late effects of treatment, second cancers, and quality of life.

He said the establishment of survivorship programs was about “getting people to a better level of physical and psychological health, as well as increasing empowerment and knowledge about their disease”.

“Family members, friends, and caregivers are also considered part of the survivorship experience.”

Judith Scott, a 62-year-old cancer survivor from the Campaspe region, believes consistency in GP care is important for patients with cancer and chronic illnesses. “I was not usually able to see the same doctor and found this very unsettling, as each time I had to tell my story again.”

Judith hopes that participating in this research will help to close gaps in treatment for others.

After 15 months of chemotherapy in Kyabram, she is set to finish her treatment in January 2019.

“I feel anxious about not having the regular contact with those who have become such a huge part of my life,” she said. “The staff are so knowledgeable, caring and do everything they can to make a very difficult time as trouble free and comfortable as possible.”

“It is not always possible for people to have their treatment close to home, so I hope this project can improve facilities and services required at such a critical time in people’s lives.”

People who are newly diagnosed with cancer, and their carers who live in the towns of Pyramid Hill, Boort, Inglewood, Wedderburn, Korong Vale, Wycheproof, Quambatook, Birchip, Donald, Charlton, Cohuna, Kerang, Swan Hill, Sea Lake, Rochester, Rushworth, Echuca or Kyabram, can learn more and get involved by visiting www.murrayphn.org.au/cancer-survivorship

For cancer information and support call the Cancer Council 13 11 20

Contact details

If you would like to speak with any of the interviewees listed above, contact: Jackie Grant, Communications Specialist e: jgrant@murrayphn.org.au or t: 0408 366 312