

Whyalla Hospital Birthing Services Review 2023

Executive Summary



Prepared for the
Department for Health and Wellbeing, SA Health

Published 28 September 2023

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Background

On 30 June 2023, the Minister for Health and Wellbeing announced an independent review into the closure of birthing services at Whyalla Hospital (henceforth, the Review). Terms of reference for the review were subsequently established and an independent reviewer was appointed by the Department for Health and Wellbeing on 6 July 2023.

Aim

The overarching purpose of the Review was to:

- Understand how and why the midwifery attrition happened at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.
- Understand what system or cultural changes could be implemented to support recruitment and retention of midwives to Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.
- Identify relevant midwifery models of care, staffing levels and skill mix at the Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.
- Provide recommendations on how to move forward and provide a safe birthing service at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.

Key findings

The primary theme or reason for the closure of birthing services was the midwifery attrition which has occurred because of a number of organisational and systemic factors, including:

- Planned transitions to retirement of midwifery workforce.
- COVID vaccine mandates.
- Issues arising from the transition to a Midwifery Group Practice (MGP) model of midwifery care.
- Fractured relationships between the Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network (FUNLHN) Executive Leadership Team, middle management and midwifery staff.
- Lack of professional midwifery support at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.

List of recommendations

To re-establish maternity services at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service, the below recommendations were proposed by the independent reviewer:

#	Recommendations	Response	Comment
1	Establish a Senior Midwifery Leadership position at FUNLHN to oversee both Whyalla and Port Augusta services and the Review recommendations.	Accepted	Critical to the re-establishment and rebuild of the maternity services at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service. To be implemented.
2	Develop an Operational Network Plan specific to the maternity and neonatal services within FUNLHN, that aligns with its Strategic Plan 2021-2026, FUNLHN Service Plan Stage One (2020) and the SA Health Statewide Midwifery Framework.	Accepted	To be implemented.

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3	Establish a system for consumer engagement with maternity services at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.	Accepted	Consumer engagement critical to re-establishment of the service. Consumer input that informs, influences and shapes the consumer experience is considered critical to successful service provision. To be implemented.
4	Relocation of the labour and delivery ward to Minya Jida	Accepted	This is a key initiative already identified by FUNLHN Executive. To be implemented.
5	Establish a 24/7 virtual midwifery telehealth service to provide support to midwives at Whyalla Hospital and Health Service.	Accepted	Review existing Virtual Telehealth serviced across the nation for best practice. Potential for pilot program. To be further assessed. Implementation subject to funding and resourcing.
6	Implementation of the following midwifery workforce recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment strategies to support targeted top-down and bottom-up recruitment • Support for workforce flexibility. • Implementation of a fully paid Registered Nurse to Registered Midwife student midwifery model. • Establishment of a rural skills development program. • A financial incentives program that provides recruitment and retention incentives to attract Midwives and Midwifery Managers to the service. • Establishment of Endorsed Midwifery positions within the LHN. • Establishment of a midwifery refresher program. • Partnerships with tertiary metropolitan maternity services. 	Accepted	Subject to consultation, funding and resourcing.
7	Triangulation of the three reports (being this Review, the Rural Support Services (RSS) Report (to be provided) and the proposed Independent Review of FUNLHN Maternity Services, scheduled to occur later in 2023 in response to the findings of the RANZCOG Accreditation undertaken in Port Augusta in June 2022.	Accepted	Consolidation of recommendations to be prepared with actions (and consideration of costings and funding implications)
8	Community partnership with local industries to incentivise relocation of families and couples.	Accepted	Subject to consultation, funding and resourcing.