

Health Care and Social Assistance

PROPOSED OUTCOME

Lithgow's health care and social assistance sector remains the LGA's largest employer and provides priority specialist and general services, centred around a Health, Ageing and Innovation Precinct, to promote the health and wellbeing of the community and consumers from neighbouring areas, including ageing and vulnerable people.

CONTEXT

Although Lithgow is considered a mining town with a rich heritage in industrial innovation and development, today the health and social assistance sector, including aged care, is Lithgow's largest employer, with 14.2% of the workforce.

However, due to the nature of the health sector, its contribution to the regional economy is only equal fourth at 5.8% of GVA in 2020-21.

The epicentre of health and ageing services in the Lithgow LGA is a public-private multi-facility campus at South Bowenfels.

The site is focused around the 46-bed Lithgow Hospital, which provides district-level care for lower complexity patients, and the not-for-profit Lithgow Community Private day surgery and specialist centre.

The site also includes specialist consulting rooms, allied health services, a residential aged care facility and the Lithgow campus of the University of Notre Dame's Rural Clinical School.



Other public health and aged care services provided by the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (NBMLHD) include the Portland Tabulam Health Service and Lithgow Community Health Centre.

Primary health care in the area is supported by the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network, delivered by Wentworth Healthcare, a local not-for-profit organisation. Lithgow is also the headquarters for Westfund, a not-for-profit health insurance provider.

The LGA is well catered for in residential aged care services, including Three Tree Lodge, Portland Tabulam Health Centre and Respect Cooinda Aged People's Home. Lithgow is also home to Treeview Estates, a 160-villa retirement village, the largest across the Blue Mountains and the Central West.

Lithgow has challenges for healthcare delivery that reflect its ageing population, and lower health

outcomes experienced by First Nations people and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, the inmate and related transient population, and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The area also has difficulty attracting medical professionals and care staff.



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GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Health care and social services, including aged care, is one of the major growth sectors across the broader Australian economy.

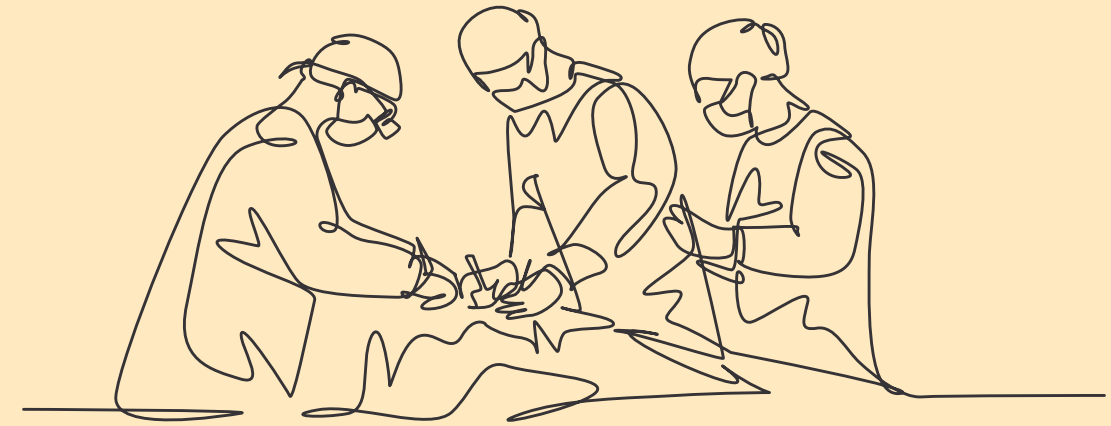
Position Lithgow at the forefront of healthy ageing

Lithgow and its villages are well placed to build on the growing demand from an ageing population, including from Western Sydney residents who may be attracted by the area's lifestyle and potential for more affordable housing, within proximity to services, family and friends in Sydney. Equally, as the gateway from the Central West and Orana, Lithgow could be positioned as enabling older residents to retain their connection to their region.

An update to Lithgow City Council's Ageing Strategy should position the LGA at the forefront of **healthy, active and better ageing** to support prolonged wellbeing and enable people to remain in their homes and communities longer. This needs to be

complemented by a focus on **new models of aged care** in people's homes, in the community and in residential aged care settings. It should also consider the particular needs of vulnerable communities who have difficulty accessing relevant services.

An innovative approach to ageing could be complemented by a **child-centric approach**, recognising that health and wellbeing outcomes throughout our lifetimes are significantly affected by childhood, particularly the first 1,000 days of a child's life. **Intergenerational connections** could also improve outcomes across generations and build community.



Local services to meet unmet demand

The development of the NBMLHD Healthcare Services Plan (HSP) 2023-28 provides an opportunity to identify unmet demand for health services that could be effectively delivered in Lithgow, rather than residents having to travel for care.

Among the issues stakeholders advocated for are:

- Expanded mental health care, including for the prison population and families, and other vulnerable groups
- More complex orthopaedics, including for the ageing community, and enhanced allied health services, rehabilitation and transitional care with dementia secure models
- Lung function tests, particularly relevant for mining and industrial-related health conditions
- More complex surgical procedures, requiring more complex anaesthetist services.

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Lithgow Health, Ageing and Innovation Precinct

While a precinct has emerged organically at South Bowenfels, the updated HSP and Lithgow Ageing Strategy could inform the development of a Health, Ageing and Innovation Precinct Masterplan for the LGA with a broader footprint.

In addition to the South Bowenfels site, it could include a second campus focused on commercial ventures – such as on greenfield employment lands on the Marrangaroo site or at the nearby Thales site – as well as service delivery areas in Lithgow and Portland. This should incorporate future infrastructure and land use needs to facilitate growth.

Services and products for new models of care

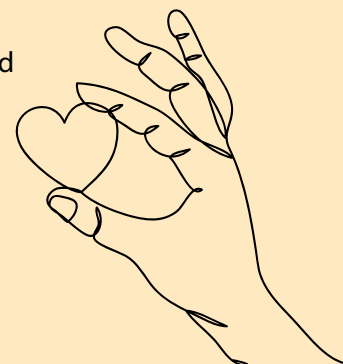
NSW Health has identified that two-thirds of the disease burden in NSW is due to conditions that could largely be managed outside the hospital setting, and that hospitalisation can exacerbate some conditions (NSW Govt, 2022).

It is working towards more people accessing service in the home, community and virtual settings, through new models of service delivery and technology. Likewise in the aged care sector, remote in-home telehealth and assistive technologies are increasingly part of the solutions enabling people to stay in their homes longer.

Economic growth in Lithgow could be supported by the attraction of manufacturers and service providers focused on providing these services, which could also benefit people with disability and other vulnerable groups.

This could include manufacturers of “smart home” products, and of equipment and home modifications, such as handrails, leveraging metal fabrication and construction material manufacturing already occurring in the LGA.

Other targets may include healthy ageing and aged care service providers, such as fitness and lifestyle services, and others aimed at providing assistance with everyday living activities and respite care, including inter-disciplinary teams.



Retirement villages, in-community ageing and residential aged care services

Lithgow LGA has strong potential for growth in retirement villages and residential aged care, given the growing ageing population in our community. As housing costs have increased in Sydney, people are increasingly selling and moving to Lithgow, its villages and valleys, particularly from the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney. There is also a potential market from Central West and Orana, such as those moving off the land who want to remain in the regions but be closer to family in Sydney.

However, as retirees increasingly prefer to stay independent, there is also the opportunity to attract targeted investment in integrated living in residential areas. For example, Council could require ageing appropriate, affordable housing that meets accessibility and technology requirements of “smart homes” to be integrated into planning or precinct controls for greenfield mixed dwelling developments.