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17 May 2013

Dear Ms Murphy

Re: Strengthening the orthoptic workforce in the ACT

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the draft report from the Allied Health Adviser's Office, "Strengthening the orthoptic workforce". As a whole, the report provides a comprehensive picture of eye services in the ACT and the role of orthoptists as qualified allied health professionals. The report also effectively outlines the nature of the pressures on the Canberra Hospital Eye Clinic and suggests strategies to address these.

The report clearly demonstrates that there has been a significant increase in the demand for service at the Canberra Hospital Eye Clinic, without a commensurate increase in staffing levels, particularly of orthoptists. What is particularly concerning for consumers is the closing of clinic books to patients with age-related macular degeneration (AMD) on two separate occasions, and the lack of public services for children, both due to resource and staff shortages. The report rightly acknowledges that many people experiencing these conditions do not have the capacity to pay for private treatment or to travel interstate for other services. In addition, the potential costs of AMD if left untreated, both in terms of financial implications and quality of life, are significant.

The mitigation strategies outlined by the report, that is, the provision of sufficient staff to deliver key clinical services, the reinstating of clinical education program for orthoptic students, improvement of working conditions and remuneration for orthoptists, and the introduction of a graduate orthoptic position will make a positive impact on the delivery of public eye services in the ACT and are wholeheartedly supported by HCCA. HCCA is particularly supportive of a greater uptake of allied health professional services for straightforward conditions, as it allows specialists to concentrate on diagnosis and the treatment of complex comorbidities.

The report was also circulated to HCCA's members for comment, who asked made suggestions which could inform the final iteration of this report and strengthen its underlying argument. Consumer representatives wanted to see clarification around the role of optometrists within the community; a breakdown of differentiations in salary for orthoptists working in public/private practice; exact figures regarding the

financial implications of orthoptists working overtime; demographic data for those with eye conditions/people who are accessing eye service at the Canberra Hospital; and a discussion of how the provision of these services connects to Medicare requirements, and in particular if a closing of services (as has occurred in the case of AMD) impacts on obligations to Medicare. One consumer also suggested that ACT Health could reap some financial reward if it ran professional clinical development courses for orthoptists, with the added benefit of providing a cheaper option for Canberra-based orthoptists to further enhance their skills without having to travel interstate.

If you would like to discuss any part of this correspondence, please contact me by phone on 02 6230 7800 or by email at darlenecox@hcca.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darlene Cox', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Darlene Cox
Executive Director