22 March 2005

NT HEALTH DIRECT

The start of a Health Call Centre in the Northern Territory is expected to improve health service standards across the NT.

NT Health Direct was launched today by the Minister for Health Dr Peter Toyne at the Alice Springs Hospital.

“This will deliver a high quality service for the Northern Territory community and builds on the extra $154 million and 100 extra nurses already in the health system,” Dr Toyne said.

“It will focus on improving community access to health information and will assist the early assessment of acute health problems. Territorians will be able to get in touch with an experienced registered nurse who will be able to help with:

- Symptoms;
- Health concerns;
- What you should do next, and when; and
- When to see a doctor or health service, and where to find them.

“It’s about providing quality health advice quickly and easily to Territorians,” Dr Toyne said.

Maxine Drake, senior advocate, Health Consumers Council WA said her state’s call service based on the same model has been an outstanding success.

"Consumers love the call centre service,” Ms Drake said.

“They tell us it provides a great option to get information from a different party rather than having to see their GP or go to a hospital Emergency Department.

“The community has embraced the service and if it were to be changed or taken away, there would be an outcry,” she said.

The first stage of NT Health Direct, an evaluation period which starts immediately, involves general medical inquiries to our hospitals’ emergency departments being redirected to the Call Centre.

The second stage will be introduced on April 20 and will see the full launch of the service for general public, including an 1800 free call number.
“West Australians have embraced their call centre with a study by the University of Western Australia revealing a 98% consumer satisfaction level – I’m sure Territorians will also appreciate this service,” Dr Toyne said.

“The Department of Health has opted to utilise the call centre facilities in WA because there is no NT-based organisation which has the capability to handle telephone triage.

“This has also provided substantial savings – what would have cost $1 million to set-up and $2 million to run in the first year will now cost about $250,000 per annum.

“The savings means the Martin Government can spend even more on building better hospitals and adding to the more than 100 extra nurses already in the Territory health system.

“The Western Australian Health Department and the Service Provider, McKesson Asia Pacific have worked closely with my Department to ensure the service is appropriate for our environment.

“This is using technology and highly trained professionals to break down the barriers of distance which face many people in the Northern Territory,” Dr Toyne said.

Contact: Richard O’Leary 0401 119 586