

Summer Preparedness in Primary Care

Zoom webinar – Tuesday, 20th October 5:30pm

Acknowledgement of traditional owners

We acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and ongoing custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We would also like to acknowledge Aboriginal people who are joining us today.



Learning outcomes

After this session, I will be able to:

- Describe the current emergency risk landscape in Tasmania, including seasonal hazards and emerging threats relevant to primary care.
- Explain the respective roles of the Emergency Preparedness Response Unit (EPRU) and primary care providers in supporting emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Describe how immunisation and communicable disease prevention contribute to community protection and health system resilience during emergencies.
- Identify strategies to enhance organisational preparedness and business continuity, including communication, workforce planning, information systems, essential supplies, and continuity of patient care.

Some housekeeping

- Tonight's webinar is being recorded
- Please use the Zoom Q&A feature to ask questions
- At the end of the webinar your browser will automatically open an evaluation survey. We appreciate you taking the time to complete this to help us improve our events programme
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<https://www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/for-health-professionals/events/>

Presenters

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Emergency Management in Primary Care: Summer Preparedness

Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit, Department of Health

- OCTOBER 2026

Learning outcomes:

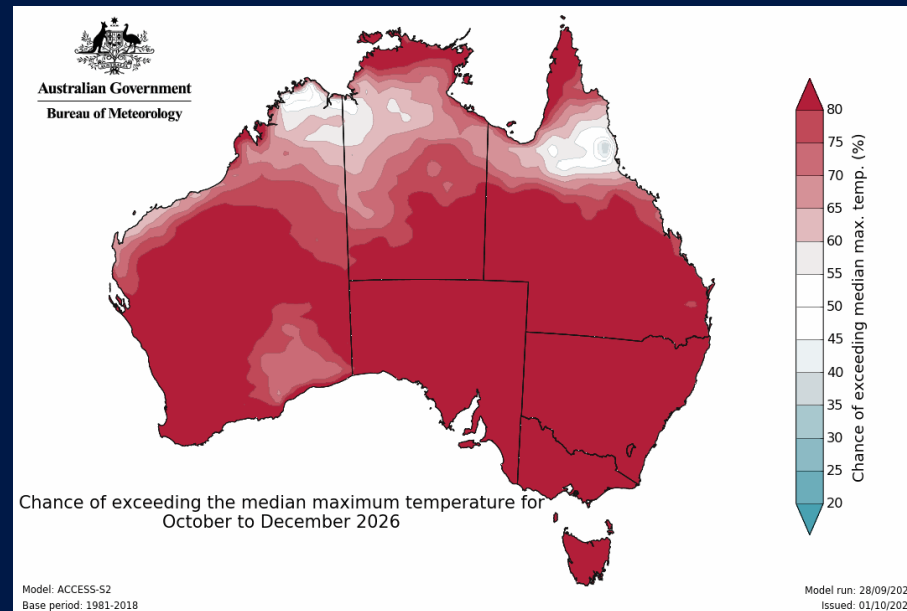
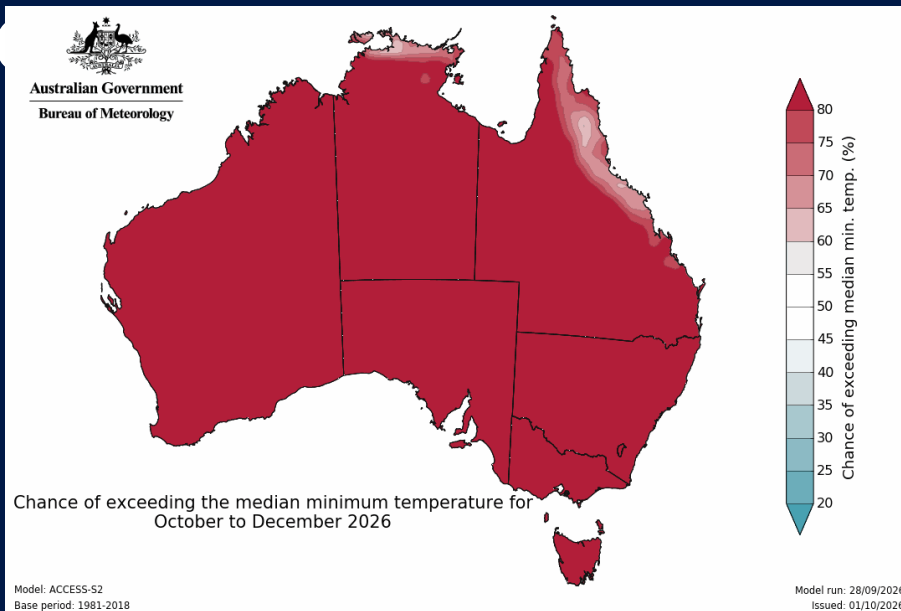
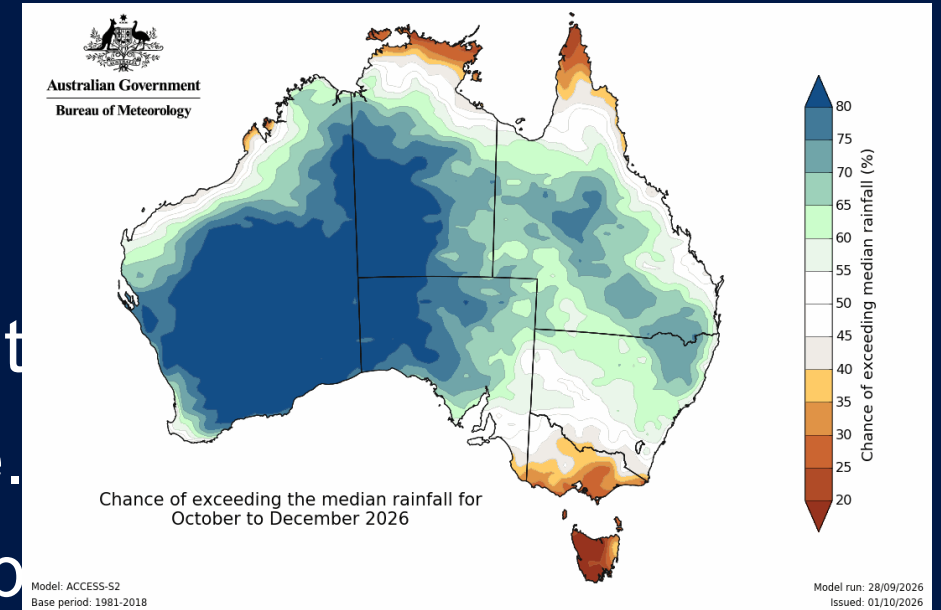
- Describe the current emergency risk landscape in Tasmania, including seasonal hazards and emerging threats relevant to primary care.
- Explain the respective roles of the Emergency Preparedness Response Unit and primary care providers in supporting emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.



“ High risk weather
season is coming.”

Long-range forecast

- The long-range forecast for October to December 2026
- **Rainfall** is likely to be below average.
- **Daytime temperatures** are likely to be above average.



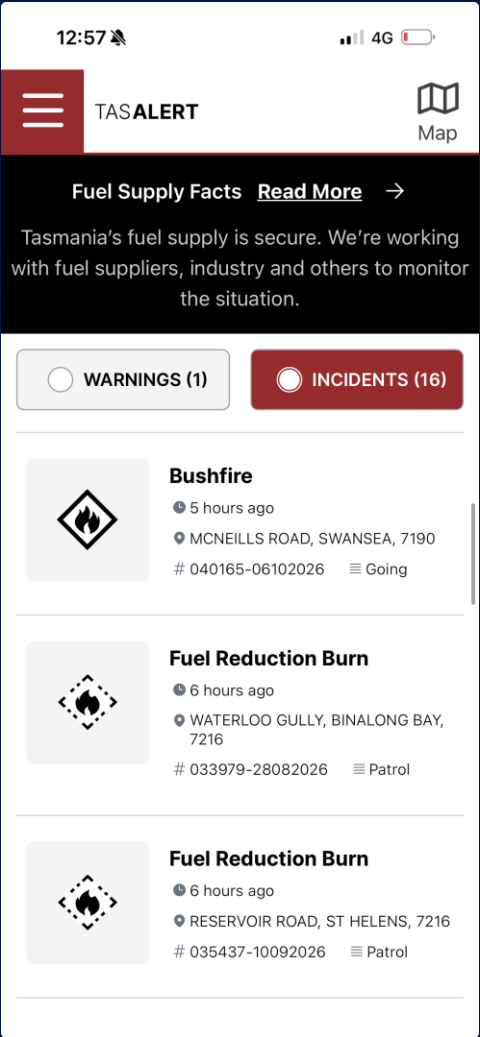
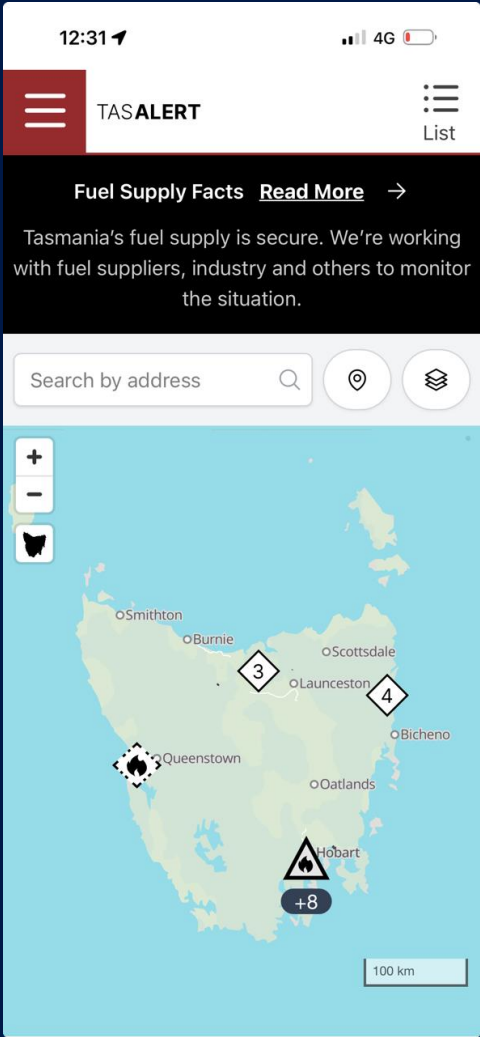
Risks and potential consequences

Risk	Consequences
Bushfire	• Longer fire season duration. • Increased frequency of elevated Fire Danger Rating days. • Greater potential for deep-burning fires in forests and peat soils. • Higher smoke exposure impacts on communities and health services. • Direct threat to health services in high risk areas. • Increased heat-related illness • Mental health stress • Community cut-off
Heatwave	• Increased ambulance demand. • Increased emergency department presentations. • Greater risk to aged care and residential care populations. • Occupational heat stress.

Compounding risks

- Bird flu
 - Low public health risk
 - Drain on government EM resourcing/fatigue heading into high risk weather season
 - For more information: [Bird flu \(avian influenza\) | Tasmanian Department of Health](#)
- Fuel crisis
 - Fuel continues to arrive in Australia as needed despite global market disruptions.
 - Sufficient forward orders of fuel imports are scheduled to arrive
 - Maintained forward orders

Maintain situational awareness



Role of the Emergency Management and Preparedness Unit

- **Preparedness**
 - Develops emergency management frameworks and plans.
 - Coordinates health-sector preparedness activities.
 - Maintains plans such as the Primary Care in Emergency Management Plan. [health.tas.gov.au]
- **Response**
 - Provides 24/7 emergency management coordination.
 - Coordinates health-system situational awareness and escalation of emerging issues.
- **Recovery**

Primary Care in Emergencies



Building community resilience



Support communities during response



Helping people recover

Three things you can do tomorrow

For General Practice

Identify patients most vulnerable to bushfire and heatwave impacts.

Incorporate emergency preparedness into routine consultations.

Review business continuity and emergency plans.

For Community Pharmacy

Encourage patients to maintain adequate medication supplies.

Promote medication preparedness and emergency prescription options.

Review arrangements for continuity of service during disruptions.

Thank you.



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Emergency Management in Primary Care: Summer Preparedness

Laura Edwards, Public Health, Department of Health

- OCTOBER 2026

Heatwaves



- Definition: “*when the maximum and minimum temperatures are unusually hot over 3 days*”
- Based on ‘excess heat factor’
- Classification:
 - low-intensity
 - severe
 - extreme
- What is the evidence for health harms in Tasmania?
 - Increased ED presentations, particularly children <5 years
 - Increased ambulance callouts
 - Increased hospital admissions
 - Increased mortality

Heat-related illness



• Risk factors

- older people
- infants and young children
- People with chronic illnesses
- People with cognitive impairment
- People with limited social support
- People with poor thermal protection in their homes
- Outdoor workers



• Medications that increase risk

- Beta blockers
- Triptans
- Anticholinergics
- Antipsychotics
- Stimulants
- ACE inhibitors
- Diuretics
- Antihypertensives

Preparing for heatwaves



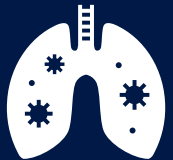
Plan ahead for hot days



Check fans, air-conditioners, fridges and freezers are working



- Keep up to date with weather forecasts



Discuss chronic conditions and medication management during hot weather



Educate about heat-related symptoms and what to do

Heatwaves: response

Respond

- Monitor the conditions and forecast
- Reduce activity
- Stay cool
 - Dress appropriately
 - Drink plenty of water
- Keep the house cool
 - Close curtains or blinds to block the sun, open them when it is cooler outside
 - Use fans or air conditioning if available
- Check on relatives and friends at risk
- Seek medical advice if unwell

Symptoms of **HEATSTROKE**

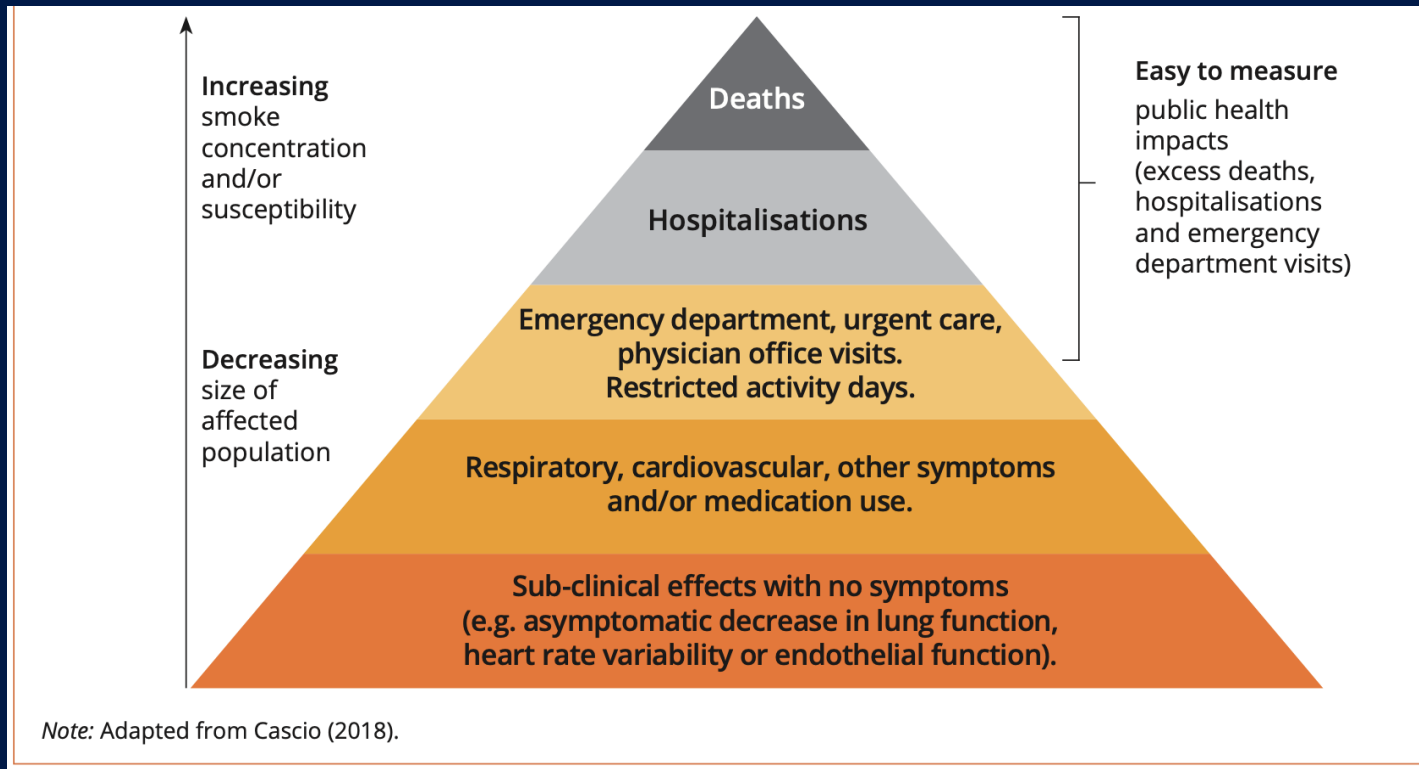
- | | |
|---|--|
| ≡ Sudden rise in body temperature | ≡ Headache |
| ≡ Red, hot, dry skin (sweating stopped) | ≡ Nausea or vomiting |
| ≡ Dry swollen tongue | ≡ Dizziness |
| ≡ Rapid pulse | ≡ Confusion, poor coordination, slurred speech |
| ≡ Rapid shallow breath | ≡ Aggressive or bizarre behaviour |
| ≡ Intense thirst | ≡ Loss of consciousness |
| | ≡ Seizures or coma |

WHAT TO DO

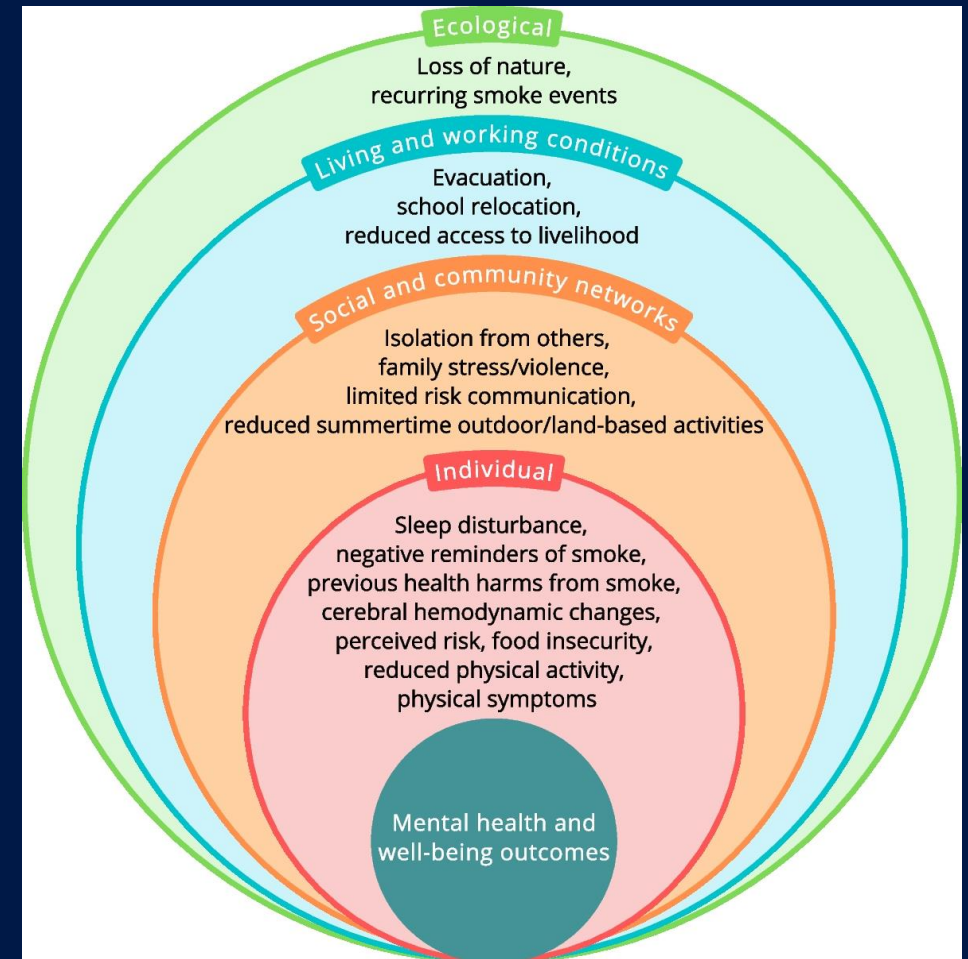
Call 000 immediately
Cool them down until help arrives

Bushfire smoke: health impacts

Physical impacts



Mental health impacts



Bushfire smoke

- Risk factors

- Young children
- Pregnant women
- Elderly people
- People with pre-existing conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease)

- Prepare

- Raise community awareness of the health effects of smoke
- Identify useful sources of information on air quality
 - AirRater app
 - EPA Tas website
- Plan what to do during smoke events – consider an action plan with patients

My bushfire smoke health plan

Name _____
Doctor's name _____
Medications or other treatment plans: _____

Emergency contact _____
Plan date _____

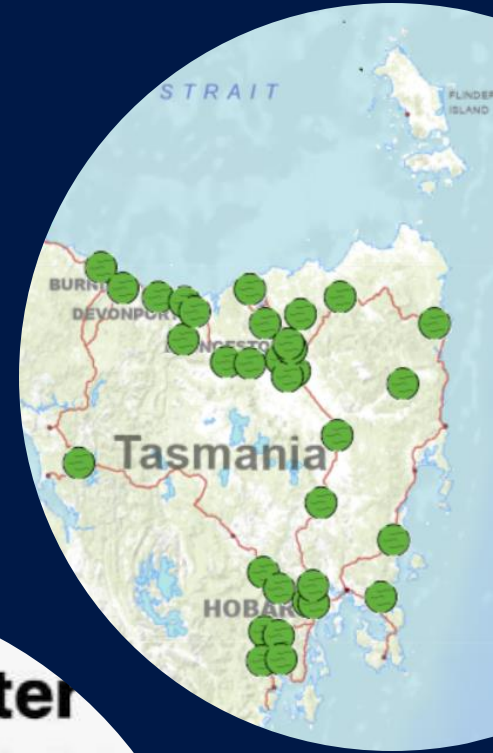
What's my risk?

Bushfire smoke can harm your health, but there are steps you can take to stay safe. If you, or any care for tick any of these boxes, smoky air could be a health risk.

☐ Over 65 years	☐ Smoke triggers distress	☐ Heart disease
☐ Babies and children under 5	☐ Asthma	☐ Stroke or mini stroke
☐ Pregnant	☐ Other lung disease	☐ Diabetes

What do I need to know?

Air quality is measured using an hourly average of 'particulate matter' known as PM_{2.5}.
The higher the PM_{2.5}, the worse the air quality.
Even a small amount of smoke exposure, even by a small amount, is good for your health.
If the air quality has been poor, the more important it is to take action.
Download the AirRater app from <https://airrater.org> to check local air quality.
More sources of local air quality information are listed here.
[sources/understanding-air-quality](#)
For emergency information



Bushfire smoke: response

- Any reduction in exposure to smoke will reduce the risk of harmful health effects
 - Monitor the situation using official information
 - TasALERT
 - Air quality:
 - AirRater app
 - EPA website
 - What to recommend to patients:
 - Stay indoors with your windows and doors closed,
 - avoid physical activity outdoors.
 - If you use an air-conditioner, make sure it's not bringing outdoor air inside.
 - consider going somewhere where there less smoke, like a friend or family's place, or a library.
 - If you have a condition such as asthma or heart disease, monitor your symptoms and follow your health plan. If your symptoms worsen, call 000 or go to your nearest hospital or GP

FAIR when PM_{2.5} is 12.5-25

POOR when PM_{2.5} is 25-50

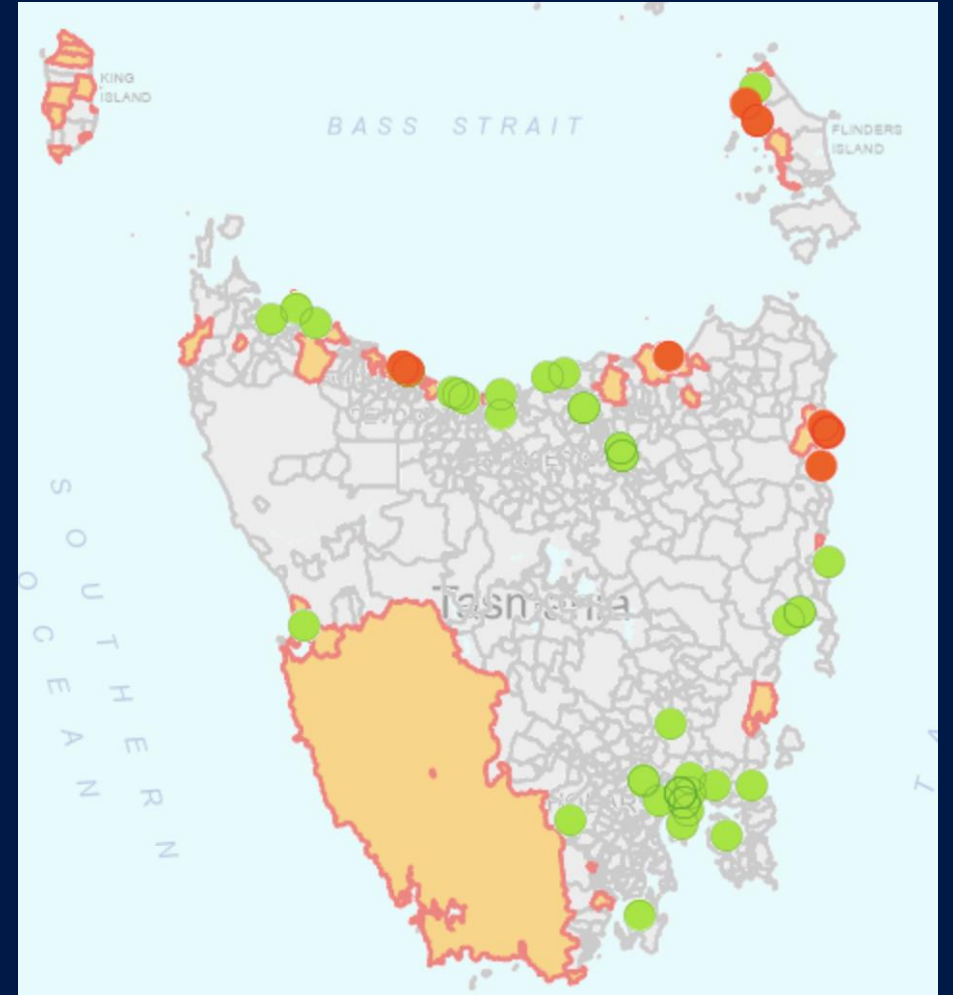
VERY POOR when PM_{2.5} is 50-150

EXTREMELY POOR when PM_{2.5} is over 150

Bird flu



- Current situation:
- 50 H5 bird flu events in Tasmania
- Risk to humans: low
- Key messages: *avoid, record, report*
- Advice to people who have contact with sick or dead birds:
- Monitor for symptoms for 10 days
- If symptoms develop, contact the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738



Bird flu: suspect case

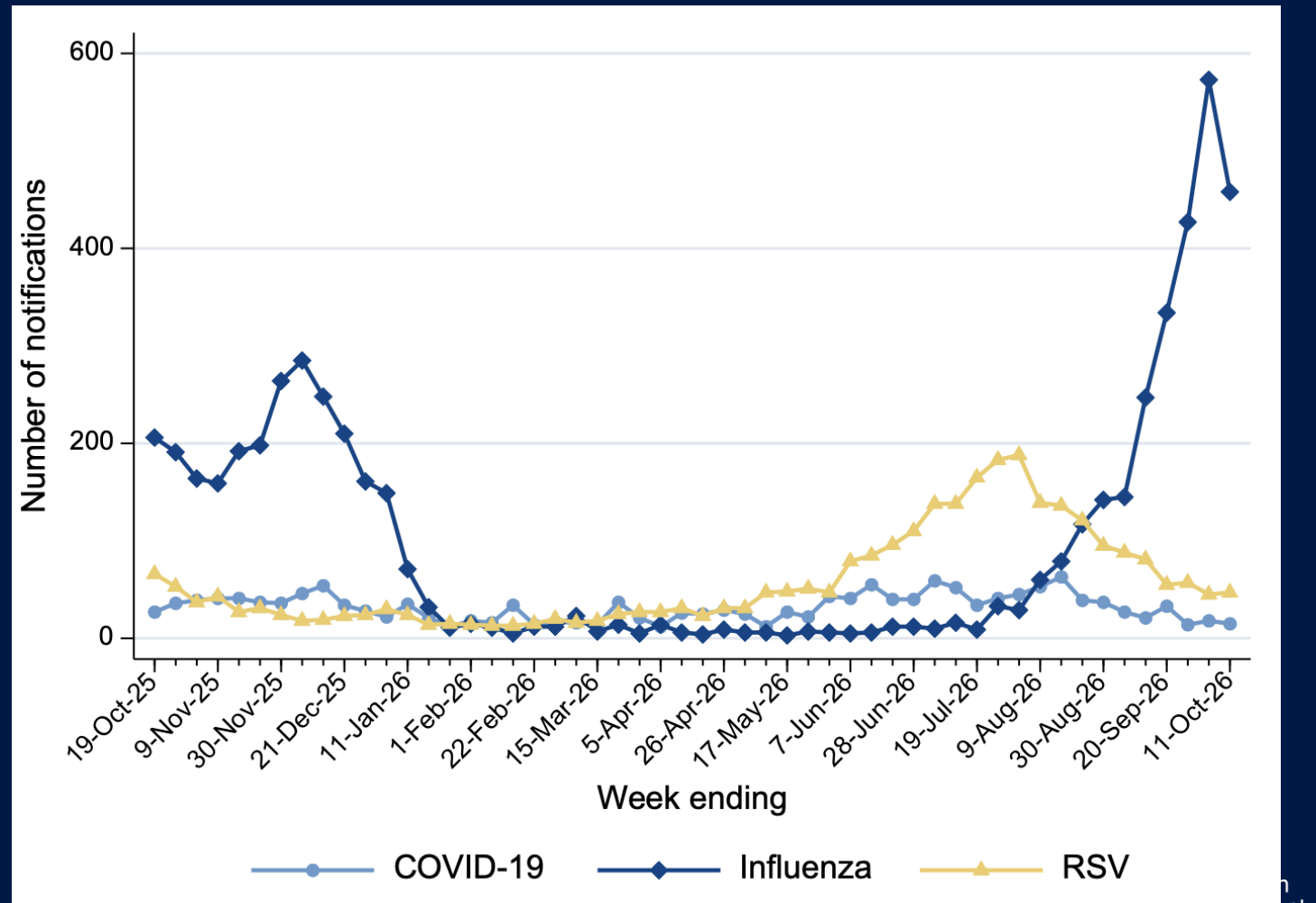
- A suspected case requires clinical evidence and epidemiological evidence
- Clinical evidence: an acute illness characterised by one or more of:
 - Fever
 - Conjunctivitis
 - Cough or rhinorrhoea or myalgia or headache or dyspnoea or diarrhoea
 - CXR infiltrates or evidence of pneumonia
- Epidemiological evidence:
 - Contact with a probable or confirmed case
 - Exposure to avian-influenza infected animals or animal products
 - Consumption of raw or undercooked poultry or other at-risk animal products
 - Handling of samples known or suspected to contain avian influenza virus

What to do:
Call Public Health



Communicable diseases

- Number of cases of COVID-19, influenza and RSV in Tasmania, October 2025 to October 2026



Communicable diseases



Gastroenteritis



Mosquito-borne
diseases



Legionella

Immunisation

- Acute respiratory infections
 - Influenza vaccine if not already received during 2026
 - COVID-19
 - Others: RSV, Shingrix, pneumococcal
- Travel vaccinations
 - Measles
 - Dengue – new
 - Others: typhoid, hepatitis A, Japanese encephalitis, rabies
- Children and adolescents
 - Catch-up missed immunisations



Key messages



- Heat and smoke are the most likely health hazards over summer
- GPs and pharmacists have an important role in supporting individuals to prepare for their own health and wellbeing needs to reduce the impact of emergencies
- Consider a smoke or heat action plan with patients at risk
- Incorporate environmental risks into chronic disease plans
- It's not too late to receive the 2026 flu vaccine
- Advise on communicable disease risks and immunisations for travellers

Resources

Centre for Safe Air safeair.org.au/

- Bushfire smoke health plan: [Bushfire smoke health plan - Centre for Safe Air](#)
- Bushfire smoke asthma plan: [Bushfire smoke asthma plan - Centre for Safe Air](#)

Air Quality

- EPA Tas Air Quality Map <https://epa.tas.gov.au/environment/air/monitoring-air-pollution/monitoring-data/real-time-air-quality-data-for-tasmania/all-sites-table>
- AirRater <https://airrater.org/>
- Heatwaves
- <https://www.health.tas.gov.au/health-topics/environmental-health/hot-weather-and-heatwaves>
- <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/extreme-heat-information-for-clinicians>
- Bushfire smoke
- <https://www.health.tas.gov.au/publications/bushfire-smoke-and-your-health>
- Bird flu
- Avian influenza in humans: National Guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov.au/resources/publications/cdna-national-guidelines-avian-influenza>
- Bird flu detections in Tas <https://nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/animal-health/poultry-and-pigeons/bird-flu>
- National dashboard: AviFluMap Bird [HPAI Dashboard](#)

General Practice resources

- Disaster planning in general practice <https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2025/january-february/disaster-planning-in-general-practice>
- Stay heat smart poster https://www.health.tas.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/2024_stay_heat_smart_a3_poster.pdf

References

- Mapping landscape fire-sourced air pollution-related mortality across 2288 local communities in Australia: a nationwide health impact assessment <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanplh.2025.101305>
- Mapping heatwave-related mortality across 2288 local communities in Australia: a nationwide time-series analysis <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2025.109747>
- Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: An examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010
<https://doi-org./10.1016/j.envsci.2014.05.003>
- The Value of Local Heatwave Impact Assessment: A Case-Crossover Analysis of Hospital Emergency Department Presentations in Tasmania, Australia

Thank you.



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Why Primary Care Matters During Emergencies

Preparedness → Response → Recovery

- Continuity of care
- Medication access
- Vaccination
- Vulnerable patient support
- Local community resilience



Summer is Coming. Is your Practice Ready?

Risks are somewhat predictable.

The impact on your practice does not have to be.

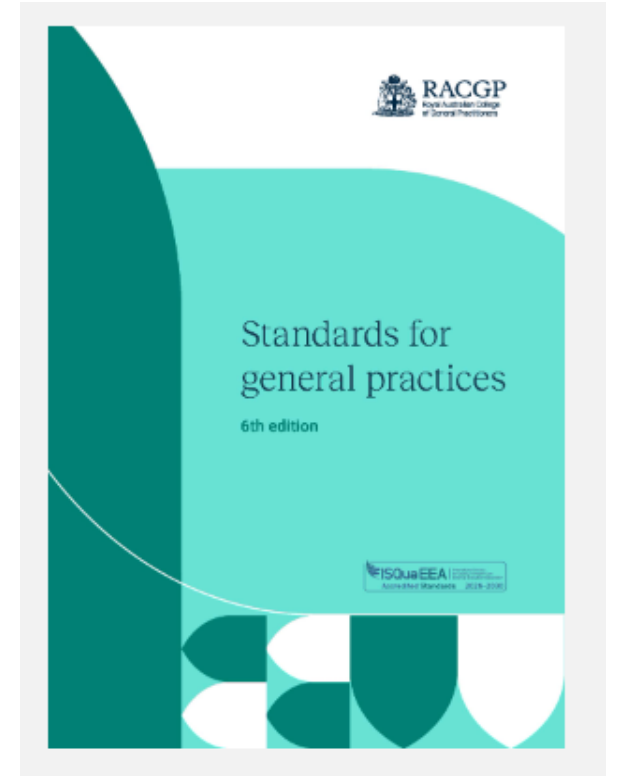
- Bushfire and smoke
- Severe weather and flooding
- Power outages
- Telecommunications disruption
- Communicable disease events

RACGP 6th Edition: Planning for Preparedness

The new standards emphasise:

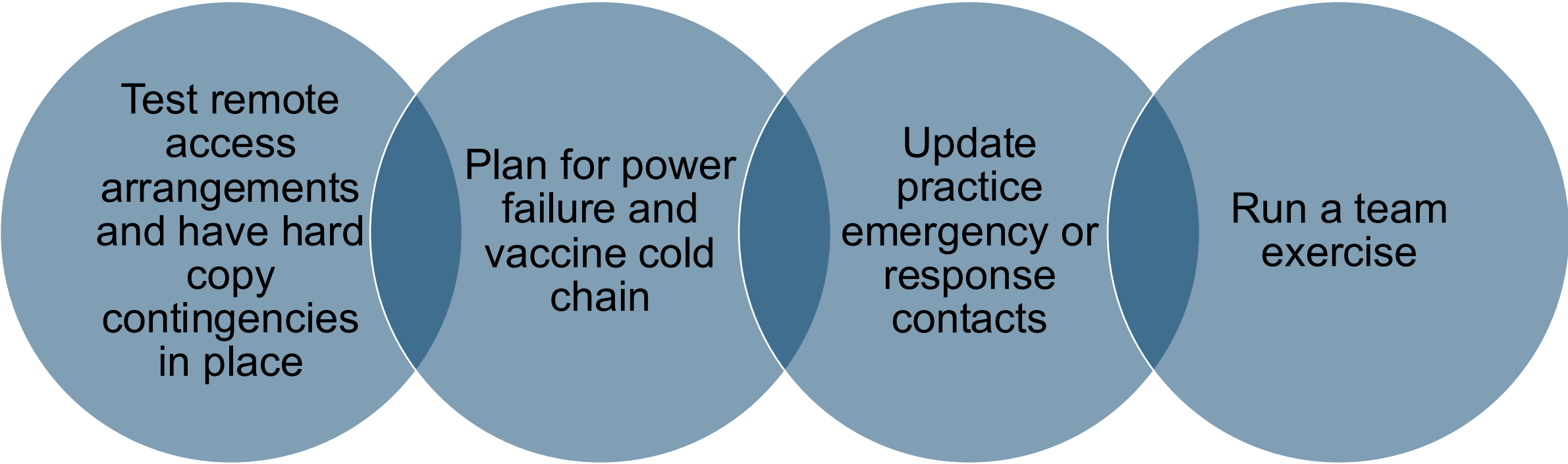
- Accessible emergency plans
- Staff who understand their roles
- Regular testing and exercises
- Business continuity and patient care
- Continuous improvement

F2 | Response planning



Consumer expectation statement: I expect that this practice has appropriate response planning in place to coordinate ongoing high-quality and safe care during emergencies and unexpected events.

Four Actions Before Summer



Test remote
access
arrangements
and have hard
copy
contingencies
in place

Plan for power
failure and
vaccine cold
chain

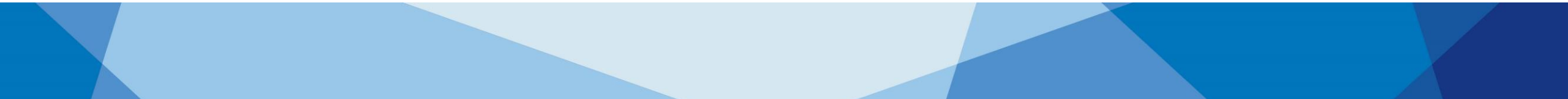
Update
practice
emergency or
response
contacts

Run a team
exercise

Quick test: Would your practice be ready?

Storm causes a 24-hour outage.
Phones down. Internet intermittent. Vaccine fridge warming. Patients are scheduled in for tomorrow.

Who leads? How do staff communicate? How are patients informed? What happens to vaccines? Can clinicians access records?



Summer Preparedness Checklist

Purpose of the document

Primary Health Tasmania has developed this checklist to support primary care services to prepare for the summer season and strengthen continuity of care during emergencies and disruptive events.

Summer risks in Tasmania may include bushfire, smoke exposure, severe weather, flooding, heatwaves, prolonged power outages, infrastructure disruptions, and communicable disease events.

Note: the information and links in this document are correct as of September 2026

Top 10 actions before summer

Action	What's involved?	☒
Review your emergency management and business continuity plans	Ensure plans are current, accessible and understood by key staff. Have a hard copy, or multiple, of the plans and document where stored. You must be able to implement evacuation, relocation and recovery procedures remotely.	☐
Update practice emergency or response contacts	Review contact details for: - key practice staff - building owners/managers - critical service providers - IT support providers - insurer and medico-legal contacts - nearby health services and pharmacies.	☐
Test remote access arrangements	Confirm clinicians and administrative staff can securely access: - clinical software - practice management systems - secure messaging - telehealth platforms.	☐
Prepare for power and telecommunications outages	Required: - backup power options - server access - vaccine cold chain contingencies - internet and phone disruptions - alternative communication methods with patients and staff - paper-based clinical and administrative backups for prescribing, pathology and radiology requests, referrals and other clinical workflows during system outages.	☐

1

Your Summer Challenge

- Complete the Summer Preparedness Checklist
- Review and update your practice continuity arrangements
- Test one critical function (but don't stop here)
- Promote a whole of practice approach by establishing designated roles

Questions

Where to from here?

Resources available:

- Summer Preparedness Checklist
- Webinar recording on Primary Health Tasmania's Learning Hub
- Relevant Primary Health Tasmania's Community HealthPathways

Connect with your local council to understand local preparedness arrangements (TEMA), evacuation centres, community needs, available supports and potential assistance during major disruptions



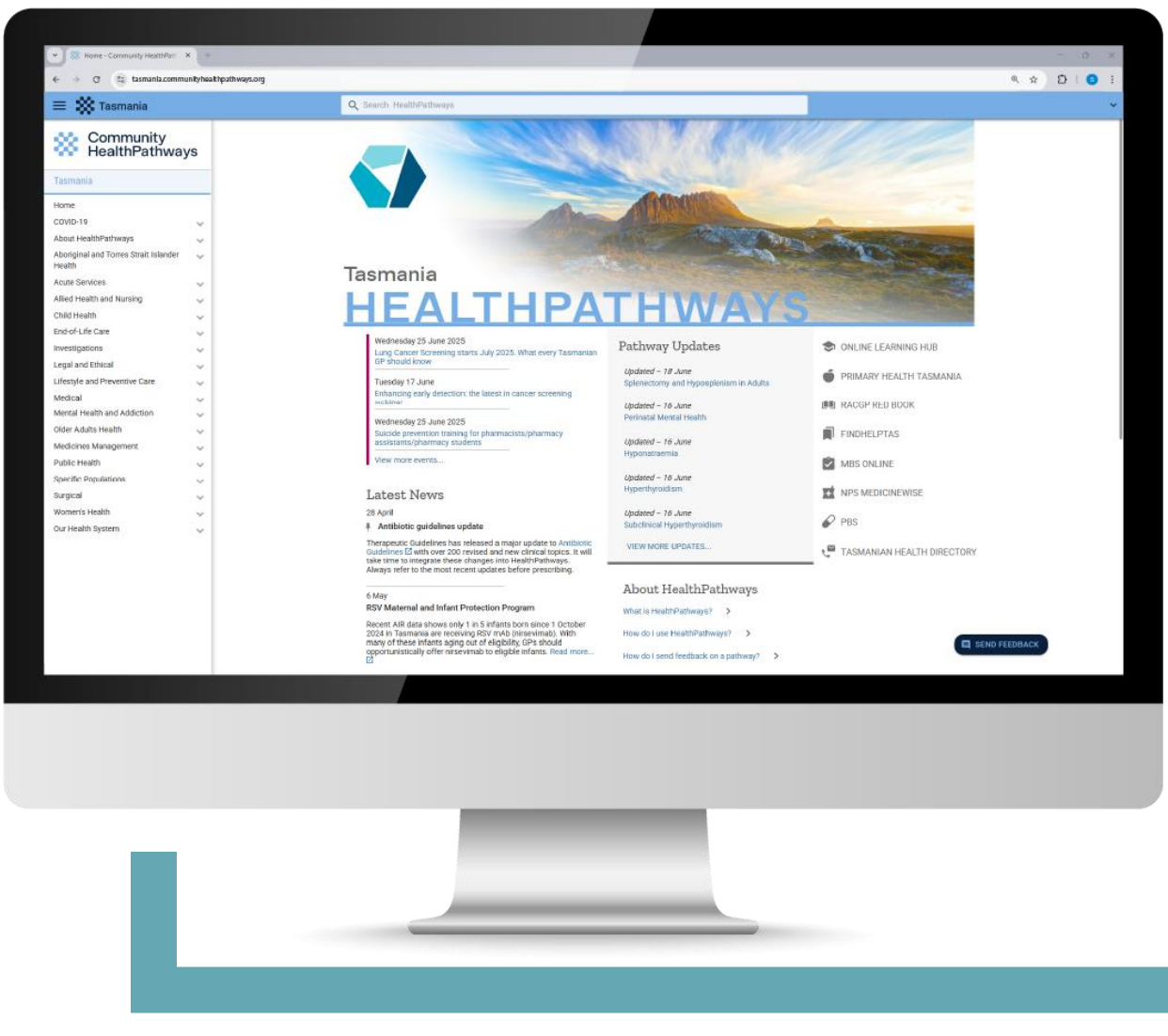
Community HealthPathways



Tasmanian HealthPathways

is a web-based information portal developed by Primary Health Tasmania. It is designed to help primary care clinicians plan local patient care through primary, community and secondary healthcare systems.

tasmania.communityhealthpathways.org



Disaster Planning and Management

↔ In This Section

- [General Practice Management During a Disaster](#)
- [Heat-related Illness](#)
- [Preparing a General Practice for a Disaster](#)
- [Preparing Patients for a Disaster](#)
- [Post Natural Disaster Health](#)



To sign in or register, please visit the Tasmania HealthPathways home page.



Scan here

Some final words

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- Statements of attendance will be emailed to participants.
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Thank you



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