



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**
WA Country Health Service

Corporate Communications Strategy 2010-2012

WA Country Health Service

June 2010

Working together for a healthier country WA

Our Values: Community | Compassion | Quality | Integrity | Justice

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A new direction has been set for improving health service delivery to country communities with the roll out of *Revitalising WA Country Health Service 2009-2012*. A key focus of *Revitalising* is to strengthen communications and community and stakeholder partnerships to assist in overcoming challenges unique to the provision of health services in country WA.

This strategy outlines how corporate communications are to be delivered at the WA Country Health Service. It aims to ensure all stakeholders are kept informed of key developments across WACHS in a timely manner.

The strategy does not specifically address stakeholder engagement which is the responsibility of the Area Director, Primary Care and Engagement, however, it does outline some of the activities which support stakeholder engagement (public meetings, workshops, dialogues, deliberative surveys, community reference groups etc) across the organisation.

By its nature, the delivery of corporate communications needs to be flexible and be able to adapt to changing organisational needs. As such, this Strategy is intended to guide delivery of corporate communications to key stakeholders rather than be wholly prescriptive.

The strategy covers the two-year period 2010-2012. It builds on the WACHS Communications Strategy 2008-10 and outlines the key components of a corporate communications plan and core materials and activities to be developed. It is designed to link to the activities outlined in the WACHS strategic direction *Revitalising WA Country Health Service 2009-2012*.

2.0 WHO WE ARE

The WA Country Health Service is the largest country health system in Australia and one of the biggest in the world. It provides comprehensive health care including hospitals, mental health, population health, indigenous health and aged care services to more than 454,000 people, including over 45,000 Aboriginal Western Australians. WACHS services cover a vast area of approximately two and a half million square kilometres.

The WA Country Health Service has seven regions – Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest, Wheatbelt, Goldfields, South West and Great Southern – which are supported by an area office in Perth.

WACHS services include six regional hospitals (regional resource centres), 15 district hospitals (integrated health services), 49 small hospitals, 47 nursing posts, 26 mental health services, three multi purpose-centres, three State government residential aged care facilities and community health services in more than 53 locations.

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Country hospitals handle almost as many emergency presentations as hospitals in the metropolitan area and similar numbers of births as the state's major maternity hospital.

WACHS has an operating budget of more than \$1billion and employs more than 8,500 full and part-time staff to provide inpatient, community, statewide and specialised services covering indigenous health, mental health, population health and aged care services.

Health employees are among the largest identifiable employee groups outside the metropolitan area. As residents and consumers they play an important role in the life and economy of the communities in which they work.

The breadth and scope of the WACHS organisation is huge, with services being planned and delivered for a particularly diverse and sprawling population with widely varying health needs. A high transient population of tourists also exists in many areas and has to be taken into account.

WACHS shares its responsibility for improving and protecting the health of country Western Australians with a range of partners who are active in the provision of country health care. The coordination and planning of services to achieve health improvements consistently involve contributions from a range of state and commonwealth government agencies, the private health sector, professional groups and non-government organisations.

WACHS is committed to open consultation and collaborative relationships with key stakeholders, as demonstrated through the establishment of District Health Advisory Councils (DHAC) throughout the regions to support community and consumer participation, as well as foster and strengthen partnerships that lead to better health services for all through the DHAC network.

2.1 Our Purpose

Our purpose - *Working together for a healthier country WA* provides the overarching goal for all WA Country Health Service employees.

What we stand for:

- A fair share for country health – securing a fair share of resources and being accountable for their use;
- Service delivery according to need – improving service access based on need and improving health outcomes;
- Closing the gap to improve Aboriginal health – improving the health of Aboriginal people, and

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- Workforce stability and excellence- building a skilled workforce and a supportive workplace.

Our Values:

Community –making a difference through teamwork, generosity and country hospitality.

Compassion - listening and caring with empathy and dignity.

Quality – striving to provide the best possible care and service.

Integrity - accountability and honesty in all that we do.

Justice – valuing diversity with a fair share for all.

3.0 Aim of Communications Strategy

The aim of this corporate communications strategy is to support the work of the WA Country Health Service by enhancing communications within and across the organisation, and with its external stakeholders and partners and the wider Western Australian community.

3.1 Objectives

- To position the WA Country Health Service as a modern health system committed to delivering safe, high-quality health care to country Western Australians;
- To establish the WA Country Health Service as the leader in the provision of rural and remote health care;
- To build and maintain a corporate reputation as a significant health entity and demonstrate the influential role the WA Country Health Service plays within the portfolio and Government;
- To increase awareness and build knowledge at a regional, state and national level, about the WA Country Health Service – its work, expertise, planning and management;
- To build community interest, involvement and support for WACHS strategies and the implementation of programs and services;
- To encourage staff to feel positive and engaged about *Revitalising*, and create a sense of unity and shared vision for the future;
- To engender the support of staff, build a spirit of corporate unity, and develop a sense of ownership and pride in a cohesive corporate culture;
- To encourage coordination and consistency of communications and community relations across the WA Country Health Service, the regions, the Department of Health and the health portfolio;

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- To assist communication activities in the regions to contribute positively to the effectiveness and overall image of the WA Country Health Service;
- Ensure key stakeholders are informed of all appropriate decisions, policies, programs, events and issues in a timely, accurate and consistent manner;
- Ensure emerging or general media stories and issues are dealt with and responded to in a timely, accurate and appropriate manner;
- Ensure the professional image of the WA Country Health Service is maintained and enhanced by the production of quality corporate documents and through effective and consistent branding.

4.0 Key Messages

The following key messages are to be incorporated into WA Country Health Service communications

- The WA Country Health Service is the largest country health service in Australia and one of the biggest in the world.
- Country hospitals handle as many emergency presentations as hospitals in the metropolitan area and similar numbers of births as the state's major maternity hospital.
- The WA Country Health Service is committed to achieving a fair share for country health.
- Closing the gap to improve Aboriginal health is a priority for the WA Country Health Service.
- The WA Country Health Service is committed to working with communities so that health and hospital services match health needs.
- The WA Country Health Service supports and values its staff and promotes excellence in the workplace.
- The WA Country Health Service provides services through an integrated network that links regional hospitals as resource centres to the smaller hospitals and health services across each region.
- In rural and remote areas, the mix of service providers, types of services offered and needs of the community differ from those in the metropolitan area.
- The changing demography and aged care needs of country communities requires focused attention to achieve access to the right mix of services in the right place.

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- Over the years the health needs and demographics of country communities have changed. Modern health care is not just about hospital services but also about preventing illness and disease and caring for people in their homes.
- Too few general practitioners and workforce shortages in regional and remote WA means we need to explore new and innovative ways of ensuring country communities continue to have access to primary or community based health services.
- A priority is to develop and deliver new models of health care to address expected workforce gaps and skills shortages.

5.0 How We Communicate

5.1 Target Audiences

The WA Country Health Service has a range of internal and external stakeholders (target audiences) for communications:

- The Minister for Health. Cabinet Members, key backbenchers and other Members of the State Parliament
- Chiefs of Staff, Policy Advisers, and media advisers in Ministers' offices
- The Federal Minister for Health, Federal Cabinet Ministers and other key members of Federal Parliament
- Australian government agencies eg Department of Health and Ageing
- The Western Australian Department of Health, other State Government departments – particularly Chief Executive Officers, key executives and senior policy officers eg Department for Communities, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Department of Housing and Works etc
- Western Australian rural community and wider community at large
- Media including news editors, chiefs of staff, health, social and financial writers and general news from state and national print and electronic media
- Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
- Community, carer, aged and sporting groups
- District Health Advisory Councils and the Health Consumers' Council
- Disability Services Commission
- Industrial and professional associations; eg the Australian Medical Association; Rural Doctors Association of WA;
- Universities and medical/nursing/allied health training schools eg; UWA; Western Australian General Practice Education and Training Ltd (WAGPET)
- Local government
- Metropolitan health services and providers of visiting services
- Non-government organisations, including Silver Chain Nursing Association
- Private health providers, including rural GPs, specialists and allied health practitioners

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- Royal Flying Doctor Service
- Safety and quality organisations
- St John Ambulance Australia and country ambulance volunteers
- Training and research organisations, including universities and TAFEs
- Workforce agencies, including the WA Centre for Rural and Remote Medicine (WACRRM)
- A network of suppliers and businesses that support the day-to-day activities of health provision.

6.0 Communication Tools and Activities

6.1 External Communications

Media

The media plays an important role in influencing opinion. Time invested in nurturing good media relations leads to increased positive coverage, to a greater level of understanding and more balanced treatment of difficult or controversial issues. Failure to engage effectively with the media can result in more hostile treatment that drains both staff time and morale.

Proactive media campaigns highlighting positive achievements of the WA Country Health Services, its staff, sites and services help build positive public sentiment for the organisation.

The Communications Manager will work with the WACHS A/CEO and the WACHS Leadership Group to identify opportunities to maximise media exposure for the WA Country Health Service area-wide in mainstream print, radio and television media as well as a range of specific health publications and e-media. Assistance will be provided where required to Regional Directors to prepare media statements, liaise with the media and organise media events.

Potential publicity/announcements include:

- New or upgraded services;
- New or improved equipment or technology;
- Reports showing improvements in health of a community;
- Milestone events for building projects;
- New partnerships formed which benefit health service delivery to the community;
- New programs or initiatives etc; and
- Staff achievements.

It is recommended that media releases should be posted on the WACHS web site at the time of their release and a subscription service offered to all external stakeholders.

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The WACHS Media Coordinator based at WACHS Area Office deals with all (reactive and proactive) media enquiries on behalf of the WA Country Health Service, its sites and services. Ideally the Media Coordinator would be supported in this role by Communications officers based in each region whose role would be to coordinate media enquiries in the first instance and to act as a liaison point between the regions and Area Office Communications Unit, particularly the WACHS Media Coordinator. Currently this role is fulfilled by the Executive Services Coordinators in each region who take on these duties in addition to their substantive roles.

Communications with media is governed by the WACHS Media Communications policy.

Advertising/Advertorial

There may be occasions where specific advertising campaigns or advertorials (non-recruitment advertising) are warranted to highlight specific services or special events, conferences, workshops etc or to complement a news media (unpaid) campaign.

Design and booking placement of advertising is currently handled by DoH Communications Directorate – Marketing. This role is currently under review and its impact on Area Health Services is yet to be determined.

Recruitment advertising is currently handled by HCN Recruitment Advertising.

Web site

The internet is an effective method of disseminating information and is a valuable communications and 'shopfront' marketing tool. It provides an opportunity to communicate WACHS messages and provide useful service information directly to a large number of patients, service users and other stakeholders.

Apart from the WACHS internet site there are currently two regional internet sites. This raises issues concerning the maintenance and management of the sites. Their effectiveness is reduced as information is often not accurate or no longer current. There is also a need to reinforce WACHS image and reputation through consistent branding and messaging.

It is recommended major review work be undertaken to ensure the site is 'consumer centric' that is, is relevant to consumers and easily navigated, and that latest developments and key directions of WACHS are highlighted to visitors to the website. It would also be beneficial to build in a service user interaction feature to provide valuable feedback, comment and engagement.

A critical factor determining the success of the internet as an effective and credible communications tool is to ensure content is appropriate, accurate and current. This

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means specific resources must be dedicated to monitoring, maintaining and regularly updating website content.

Further development of the website is recommended to address a key WACHS priority – workforce recruitment. There is scope to develop web opportunities to improve the interactive potential of the website for example, on-line submission of resumes and job applications and video uploads of testimonials of overseas doctors and medical staff working in WA.

Newsletters

The WA Country Health Service newsletter ***The Country Link*** aims to provide an overview of the activities across the WA Country Health Service. Hard copies are distributed to key external stakeholders and uploaded in pdf format onto the WACHS website.

The newsletter showcases the work being done as well as providing the WACHS CEO with the opportunity to provide leadership and direction across the organisation and establish a public face for the organisation in its relationship with stakeholders.

E-newsletters/e-bulletins

E-newsletters and bulletins have the advantage of providing a more expedient and cost-saving alternative to 'printed newsletters' to target stakeholders and reduce the reliance on global emails to staff.

It is recommended that a review be carried out to identify and seek feedback from key stakeholder groups (including staff) who would benefit from targeted e-newsletters and e-bulletins and that these be introduced as soon as possible.

Brochures/publications

A range of brochures, fact sheets and other material is produced across the WA Country Health Service to promote capital works projects, various new health services and initiatives and health promotion activities.

DoH Communications Directorate- Marketing currently provides a free graphic design service for these publications, however, this role and the publication process itself is currently under review.

It is recommended that a publications audit be carried out WACHS area-wide to determine what publications are produced, their frequency and target audiences and any associated production costs. It is recommended that a process be developed for coordinating the production of future publications to ensure appropriateness, accuracy, consistency of messages and branding.

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Database

Currently, there is no central database containing contact information about stakeholders and partner organisations that could be accessed for use in implementing public relations or communications strategies.

A central contact database and distribution list should be established. This could be developed by sending a mailout/global email to health professionals, consumer groups and non-government organisations inviting them to register to be added to the database.

This database would need to be regularly updated throughout the year as new people register and to confirm details are current. It would also be useful to review the level of the relationship and frequency of contact between stakeholders and WACHS when evaluating communication strategies and other activities.

Display Material/Banners

Display material, such as pull-up banners and posters have been developed for use at public meetings, media events, conferences to present and build on WACHS corporate image as a leading health service provider. There are constant requests for material especially to support recruitment marketing activities, career expos etc. All such material should reinforce WACHS branding, key messages and corporate image.

Photo Library

There is a need to build up a photographic library of high-resolution images featuring staff and service delivery as well as capital works projects, for use in promotional publications and other activities.

It is recommended that the DoH Communications Directorate-photographer be commissioned to undertake an extensive photo-shoot to capture appropriate images. The DoH Communications directorate is working towards establishing an on-line photo library for easy access by Area Health Services.

Events/expos/public presentations

WACHS Communications staff should work with the CEO, Area Executives and Regional Directors to identify occasions to engage with their designated stakeholder groups in the regions, speak at conferences and participate in expos and other similar opportunities.

These could include major state, national or international conferences or at the more micro or local level such as presentations to Shires and local Chambers of Industry

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and Commerce, Rotary or Lions Club, sporting clubs, field days and agricultural shows or similar community level events.

Annual Report

The Annual Report should be reviewed to ensure its potential as a tool for stakeholder communication is maximised and that it builds the corporate profile of WA Country Health Service. It should be easily located on the WACHS website and be presented in a user-friendly format.

6.2 Internal Communications

Intranet

A fully functional intranet is a valuable tool, which can transform internal processes and significantly improve internal communications for all staff regardless of their profession or geographical location. It can greatly reduce the need for global emails that can clutter email in-boxes.

An effective intranet site is one where it meets the information needs of its users and provides content that will help individuals to carry out their everyday jobs more effectively and in a timely manner.

It is recommended that a review of the WACHS intranet should be carried out to ensure it meets the communication needs of users. For example, a new *Latest News* feature could be launched as a vital default communication tool to share information with staff about the key projects and priorities of WACHS. The effectiveness of this would rely on it being updated on a regular basis to ensure the news is relevant and current to staff.

Meetings

Meetings form one of the foundations of internal communications. Regular meetings that help support the two-way flow of information include:

- Leadership group
- Area Executive
- Operational managers
- Staff meetings

Minutes are taken at all meetings and action items identified. Minutes should be circulated as appropriate as soon as possible following a meeting to ensure effective flows of information. Minutes should be able to be accessed by relevant membership via the intranet.

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It is recommended that consideration be given to the CEO producing and distributing (via global email or preferably through 'news' on the intranet to staff) a summary of actions/decisions taken at meetings of Executive/Leadership Group Level as appropriate and relevant.

Staff briefings/forums

Staff forums provide an opportunity for open and frank discussion about issues and priorities and encourage staff feedback, to keep all staff informed and encourage their input into the decision-making processes. The CEO makes regular visits to the regions to lead staff forums. Regular staff briefings are also offered via teleconferencing. The Regional Directors hold similar regular staff briefings to keep staff informed and involved.

Feedback: Staff questions, comments and suggestions

All staff should have the opportunity to ask questions of their managers and to obtain feedback from them. There is a need to increase opportunities and methods for staff to provide feedback. It is recommended that a section on the intranet be developed to allow staff to submit questions, comments or suggestions. These could be forwarded to the appropriate manager for a reply within an agreed timescale or be addressed in general terms in the staff newsletter as appropriate.

Schedule of initiatives/Communications diary

A schedule of initiatives/communications diary is being developed to ensure a coordinated approach to the planning and implementation of communications activities to strengthen communications with regional communities.

This schedule of initiatives is also useful in advising the A/Director-General WA Health and the Minister/s for Health and Mental Health of WA Country Health Service achievements/events/etc.

Calendar of Events

To ensure staff are informed about upcoming events, anyone organising an event could enter it (via the Communications Unit) into the Calendar of Events (an on-line tool which would be available on the intranet). Workshops, conferences, media events, together with launches and significant dates and anniversaries at a regional or WACHS wide level should be discussed with WACHS Communications staff as early as possible to explore all communication opportunities.

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Staff E-Newsletter

It is recommended that a WACHS-wide staff e-newsletter should be produced every 6-8 weeks. It would contain a balance of staff interest stories, staff news, updates on employee related issues and staff achievements.

Staff Newsletter

It is recommended that a printed newsletter incorporating similar information as the staff e-newsletter be produced on a regular basis to reach WACHS staff who do not regularly access computers/IT during their working day.

Global emails

The CEO's messages can be influential in signposting the priorities of an organisation. However, currently, there is a tendency to overly rely on global emails as a primary means of internal communications.

For example, some globals come from the Department of Health and relate to administrative/housekeeping type matters relevant only to Royal Street staff; others come from the Director General DoH; CEO WACHS; some from Human Resources re: employment vacancies; information about professional development courses; creation of new web pages etc.

It is recommended the use of global emails be reviewed as much of this information would be better on the Intranet, avoiding overloading mailboxes and overwhelming recipients with irrelevant information while ensuring important messages reach their target audience.

Staff award program

Staff award programs can be valuable in fostering a positive workplace culture. It is recommended that a WACHS staff award program be considered. For example, the award program could acknowledge outstanding performance of staff and commitment to the value and direction of the WA Country Health Service across a variety of categories.

An opportunity could be extended to the Minister for Health to select an overall winner to be awarded a Minister's Award, personally selected from the winners of each category.

Winners, for example, could be offered a funded (eg, \$5,000) professional development opportunity of their choice. This would potentially foster new and innovative ideas and bring potential improvements and enhancements back to the organisation gained by staff taking up the opportunity for professional development.

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Notice boards

Notice boards are an important source of information especially for staff who do not have regular access to mail. Nominated staff have responsibility for updating notice boards ensuring staff without regular IT access are kept informed of any e-mail briefings. This should be extended consistently throughout the organisation.

Corporate induction

It is recommended that new staff receive an introduction to the organisation through a compulsory induction course. Induction is an important opportunity to communicate essential information to new staff.

This introduction should include information on the values and strategic direction of the organisation, communication processes within the department, the relationship to the Minister's office and communication policy and procedure.

Media training

As the media is such an important channel through which to communicate the WA Country Health Service's messages, it is recommended that regular media training workshops be offered to key staff, particularly the CEO, Area Office Executives, and the Regional Directors who are the major WACHS spokespeople.

7.0 Evaluation of Success

Staff survey

A staff survey should be carried out on a regular basis (eg every two years) to provide colleagues with a major opportunity to give feedback on the organisation relating to issues including communications, training, level of involvement in decision-making, equity and treatment in workplace, safety and working environment.

Feedback provided would give a snapshot of how well WACHS is communicating with its staff and the opportunity to measure progress against previous years.

Internal Communications Audit

It is recommended that an internal communications audit should be carried out as appropriate with the aim of identifying means of communication that staff find most successful, appropriate and useful.

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The information gathered will inform this strategy and help identify priority areas for action. Audits will also provide an indicator of progress against the action plan.

Media monitoring

A media monitoring service is provided by the Department of Health Communications Directorate. News alerts are also circulated to highlight specific issues.

A media query tracking database has also been established within the WACHS Communications Unit. This database logs all media queries, received, as well as the ability to record the level and type of coverage generated, for example, positive/negative/neutral. This information can be included in regular reports to the CEO and WACHS executive as required and used to assist in the evaluation of media communications processes

8.0 Budget and Resource Implications

For this communications strategy to be successful, activities and actions outlined will require an appropriate budget allocation and additional resources.

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