

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Member for Kurrajong
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Chief Minister

RE Retain the hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital

We are writing to request that you reconsider your decision to close the hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital (TCH) in June 2019.

The therapeutic benefits of water have been used for people's wellness throughout history.

"Warm water melts muscle tension, increases range of movement, stimulates circulation, reduces swelling, soothes stress, eases pain, calms nerve sensitivity, decongests the respiratory tract, purifies pores and promotes sleep" Caroline Robertson wrote for the Wellbeing magazine.

The hydrotherapy pool at TCH is due to be closed despite the importance of this health service.

The Woden Valley and Weston Creek communities host an older demographic and people with the highest burden of chronic pain conditions. The hydrotherapy pool provides some relief from pain however the supply of services is not keeping pace with the increasing demand for services in the south of Canberra.

While we appreciate the new University of Canberra Hospital (UCH) will provide rehabilitation services for Canberra's growing population, we believe that the demand for hydrotherapy services warrants the provision of two publicly funded facilities, in both the north and south of Canberra.

Access to facilities in Canberra's south is constrained by existing users and cost. We are concerned about the capacity of the UCH to service the growing number of people in the south requiring hydrotherapy services. A summary of the available facilities and the constraints on access by the Arthritis Foundation of ACT can be found at **Attachment A**.

Without the hydrotherapy pool at TCH, it is likely that clients will be asked to travel to the hydrotherapy pool at the UCH. Without a car, this will require significant time for community members with mobility issues to walk to bus stops and change buses to access the pool in Bruce. For those that need to take a taxi, access to services becomes very expensive.

While we talk about 'A Fair Go' we are leaving vulnerable members of our community with poor options for the management of their health.

Woden is centrally located on the main north-south and east-west public transport alignments making it accessible and an ideal location to locate facilities. Research shows that social inclusion is important to people's health and wellbeing and basic facilities provide opportunities to build connections between people and develop relationships.

Notwithstanding this, the hydrotherapy pool at TCH is closing and we are not clear why. We ask that you provide us with the analysis of the data and underlying assumptions that informed the decision to close TCH hydrotherapy pool. We assume this will include a breakdown of the operating costs associated with both the UCH and TCH hydrotherapy pools.

Finally, we would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the hydrotherapy pool, the future of the broader TCH precinct, including opportunities for the CIT site, and other matters relevant to Woden.

We thank Minister Fitzharris for her commitment to attend Woden's public meeting on Wednesday 5 June 2019 to discuss these issues.

Yours sincerely



Ms Fiona Carrick
President
Woden Valley
Community Council
24 - 4 - 19



Ms Jenny Kitchin
CEO
Woden Community Service



Jenny Mobbs
CEO
COTA ACT



Ms Rebecca Davey
CEO
Arthritis Foundation of ACT,
Incorporating Osteoporosis ACT

cc Minister Fitzharris as Minister for Health and Wellbeing
cc Minister Ramsay as Minister for Seniors and Veterans
cc Minister Steel as Minister for Community Services and Facilities



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Hydrotherapy Program

Background

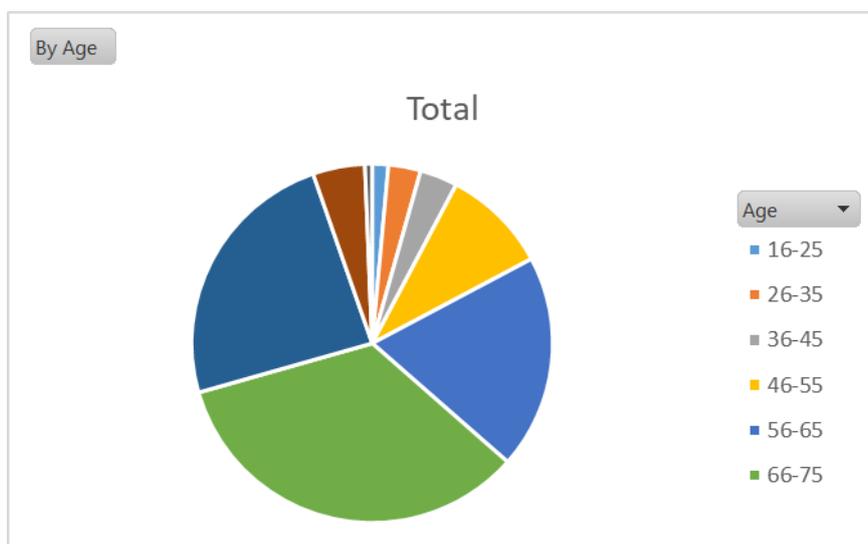
Arthritis ACT has been operating a therapeutic hydrotherapy program for approximately 25 years. Initially the program was operated solely from the TCH pool. It has now extended to 5 pools across Canberra and 35 sessions per week.

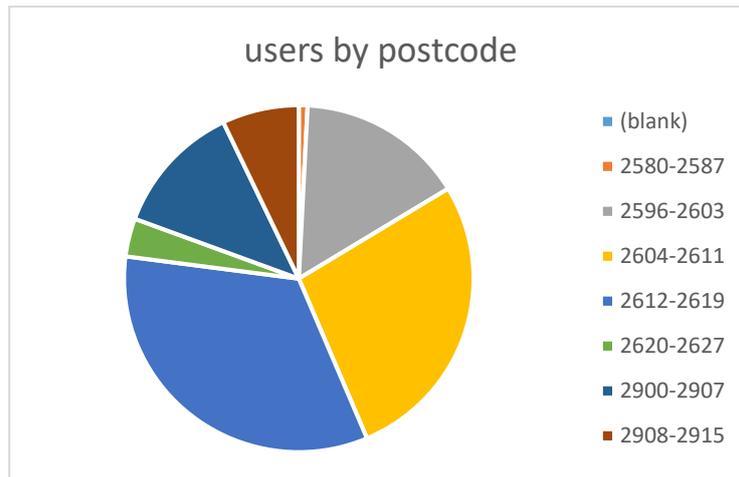
Current Usage

The hydrotherapy program is experiencing a huge surge in usage, with approximately 100 new clients a month signing up a month to be a part of the program since January. We gain approximately 10 new clients a month on direct referral from the UCH program. Many of these clients are low income earners and we offer them free membership and access to the pool for self-lead programs.

Demographic of pool users

We have 623 current users of the therapeutic hydrotherapy program. This is up from 383 in November 2018, so the demand is currently growing quickly.





Factors about the program

- All sessions are supervised either by a staff member who is allied health trained, or a supervisor who is trained in pool rescue and CPR at a minimum, with many supervisors having qualifications in exercise, health science or working with people with disabilities.
- All supervisors and staff have undertaken WwVP checks.
- Programs run only by volunteers are self-lead exercise only. All clients have either undertaken a program privately or through ACT Health, or have seen the Arthritis ACT physiotherapist or exercise physiologist to get a personalised program.
- Programs lead by an exercise physiologist follow either a structured program or are designed for an individual or a small group.
- No more than 12 persons are in the pool at any one time. This is for safety and to protect the equipment.
- Supervisors are all in the pool or prepared to get into the pool in an emergency.
- All supervisors have training in the emergency procedures for the particular pool they work at.
- We allow individual carers into the pool for those who need individual support. The carers are not charged any fee and do make up total numbers in the pool.
- Arthritis ACT maintain a full policy and procedure manual related to all areas of hydrotherapy and often share this with other organisations to implement. We maintain ongoing risk management and insurance to cover all volunteer supervisors and pool users.
- All pool users must have a medical clearance undertaken at the beginning of their relationship with us and this is updated by deed annually or whenever a major life change occurs ie surgery, change in health status, etc.

Individual Pool Issues

TCH

- The ongoing concern of the pool closing. We currently utilise this pool 20 hours a week and need to increase this. Where do we gain this type of access, and at what cost?

UCH

- Need access to more daytime usage – we could fill this pool every day at lunchtime.
- Issues accessing the pool at times due to the procedures to gain the key but staff are often not available.
- The air conditioning at this pool needs to be reviewed so it is not blowing across the water.

Black Mountain School

- We are having ongoing issues with students being obsessed with the pool and the school is currently reviewing whether they can allow outside users to use the pool any longer. This would be a major blow for the program as we have a lot of inner north elderly people who utilise that pool. These sessions are generally full ie 12 participants.
- We pay \$4.60 per client accessing this pool.

Calvary John James Hospital

- This pool is often not heated to a suitable temperature – the heating is apparently turned off in the morning and doesn't come back on until late in the day after our session. On Monday's it remains warm as there is an antenatal class after us and they keep it warm for this cohort.
- There have been complaints that this pool is not kept as clean as other sites – often has a rim of scum around it.

Club Mmm

- This is a popular hydrotherapy pool and we have 3.5 hours of pool time a week which has been hard to get as so many groups use this pool.
- It is costly at \$60 an hour. We often don't break even on these sessions just on pool fees alone, let alone the costs of maintaining all the systems in the background including staff and volunteer training.

Other possible sites

We have and maintain information on all therapeutic hydrotherapy pools across the ACT. We have not been able to gain access to any other privately run pools in the ACT. We did utilise Gold Creek and then Forde (Aquatots) for a period of time however these pools were usually too cold (around 30 degrees), and the pools were constantly being closed at our booked times due to staffing at the pool site.

We did have conversations with Malkara school prior to June last year. We would only be able to access this pool 3 mornings a week from 0710 to 0800 (people would have to be in their cars by 0800). We also had the problem of having to remove the pool covers which are too heavy for most of our volunteer supervisors. This pool was also going to cost \$106 a session, a sum we would then need to recover from ACT Health. This pool was also not deep enough for most participants especially those who need to do upper body work.

Ausport Funding Grant

Arthritis ACT was successful in gaining funding in part of the Arthritis Australia tender submission for the recent Ausport funding round. As part of this program we are being funded for an extra 12 sessions of lead therapeutic hydrotherapy exercise sessions a week. At the time of this application we did not know the TCH pool had such a short timeline and had planned for the majority of these sessions to be held at this pool. The closing of the pool will put this Commonwealth funding in jeopardy, and the 120 persons who could have accessed this program each week will no longer be able to access such a program. This program is directed at new participants, in the over 65 cohort, and could have taken some of the waiting list from the UCH Outpatients hydrotherapy program to lessen the waiting time in the public system.

Recommendation

Arthritis ACT wants to work with the ACT Government to improve the health and social connectedness of the ACT Community.

We recommend:

- TCH remain open until an appropriate therapeutic hydrotherapy pool is built, preferably at the Stromlo complex, as was promised by the Chief Minister in June 2018.
- If an appropriate therapeutic hydrotherapy pool cannot be built at Stromlo that land be gifted to Arthritis ACT to develop a therapeutic hydrotherapy centre. Arthritis ACT could then work with other philanthropic organisations to develop this centre.
- That a dedicated hydrotherapy centre be based on the southside where the greatest area of ageing is based. The northside is well serviced at this point, although the potential loss of Black Mountain School will have an impact on the northside.

Rebecca Davey
CEO
Arthritis ACT
15 March 2019