

Proposal to integrate the Health Emergency Management Unit and Public Health Response and Capability Team

Purpose

We are seeking to consult with staff in the Health Emergency Management Unit (HEMU) and Public Health Response and Capability Sections (PHRAC) on a proposal to integrate and bring together the two teams. This change would see both teams operate in unison as part of the newly established Preparedness, Planning and Surveillance (PPS) Branch.

Background

The ACT Government 2023-24 Budget delivered funding for enhanced support for the future management of public health and communicable disease threats, including COVID-19. This funding decision reflects the Government's commitment to continued and ongoing support for enhanced management of new and emerging public health threats.

The additional funding (and FTE) provided has enabled a new Branch to be established within the Population Health Division (PHD). The Preparedness, Planning and Surveillance (PPS) Branch was established with effect from 3 July 2023. At the same time, the COVID-19 Response Branch was officially dissolved. Some activities relating to the COVID-19 response will be ongoing, and these will be managed by the PPS Branch.

The new Branch consists of four teams (noting that section names are interim):

- Public Health Response and Capability
- Public Health Risk Communications
- Public Health Epidemiology and Reporting
- Delivery of the Chief Health Officer Emergency Report

HEMU is currently a separate team located within the Health Protection Service (HPS) reporting to the Executive Branch Manager (EBM), HPS.

Separate to this proposal, work is underway to consider the broader PHD structure, reflecting the success of the business case, the results from the recent 6-month PHD realignment check-in survey and ACTPS Staff Survey results. A separate consultation process will commence with the whole Division over the coming weeks. It is anticipated that this process will see some further change for the PPS Branch.

Proposed Change

In view of the very close synergies between the HEMU and PHRAC roles, it is proposed that these teams are brought together into one new section within PPS. It is proposed that the new section will report to the EBM, PPS through the newly created Senior Director, PHRAC.

The proposal takes account of a draft proposal developed within HEMU and provided to the PHD Executive as part of feedback and comments on the draft NOUS Review of the Health Directorate's COVID response on 16 June 2023.

The integration of HEMU and PHRAC sections would support the critical need for close collaboration and interaction across critical facets of work undertaken by both teams.

In coming together, both teams will bring extensive and diverse experience, knowledge and perspectives – all of which are critical to delivering on the ACT Government and Health Directorate priorities.

The proposed changes do not seek to diminish the value or expertise of either team, or individuals within these teams. Rather, the changes reflect the value of the combined knowledge and skills, and the need for close synergies and collaboration, as we move forward and embed the learnings of the last three years to establish new and enhanced public health emergency management capability in ACT Health.

Further, it is also expected that there will be national and whole of ACT government changes to emergency management principles including an increased focus on resilience, which will require close collaboration for these teams, and more broadly across PPS and PHD. Implementation of the proposed changes will position ACT Health well to adapt to these changes as they occur.

How best to achieve collaboration and engagement

We are seeking staff views on how best to ensure that there is strong and ongoing interaction, engagement and collaboration, including views on location and seating arrangements. This is particularly important for the combined PHRAC/HEMU team (prior to and post implementation of the proposal) but will also support broader and important interaction across PPS.

Some of the key principles to consider are outlined below.

- The Directorate's hybrid working arrangements which allow a mix of working from office and home, and noting the new three-day roster system that has been in place since 1 May 2023.
- Consideration could be given to a combination of working from Bowes Street, Howard Florey Centenary House, Holder and from home each week. The roster system provides that PHD staff can work at Bowes Street from Monday to Wednesday.
- Seating arrangements need to allow for staff to be seated as a combined group when working in the Office, preferably alongside other PPS teams.
- The importance of sustaining and enhancing operational capabilities.

Details of the Directorate's flexible working arrangements can be found on the [ACT Health intranet](#).

Timeframes for consultation

Staff are asked to consider this proposal and provide feedback by close of business on 18 July 2023. This provides one week for consultation. Feedback can be emailed to vanessa.dalmolin@act.gov.au.

Next Steps

EBMs for HPS and PPS (Victor Martin and Vanessa Dal Molin) will be available to meet with individual team members during the consultation period. Both Victor and Vanessa can respond to any questions by email also. All feedback will be considered by the PHD Executive Group as a priority.

It is proposed to implement the change with effect from Monday 24 July 2023.

Staff will have an opportunity to contribute to an appropriate name for the new combined team.

Development of an integrated section plan, to inform finalisation of the PPS Business Plan can be considered early in the implementation process, with all teams to be asked to contribute.

Wellbeing

We acknowledge that times of change can impact individuals differently. Please ensure that you reach out to your Manager, work colleagues, family or friends to discuss how you are feeling. You may also wish to consider using the Directorate's EAP services, the details of which can be found on the [ACT Health intranet](#).