

St Lukes Submission on Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2025 – Exposure Draft

November 2025

Introduction

St Lukes welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2025 – Exposure Draft. As Tasmania’s leading not-for-profit health and wellness organisation, we strongly support reforms that strengthen councils’ capacity to influence community health and wellbeing outcomes.

Local government sits at the beating heart of community life, uniquely positioned to understand local needs and mobilise place-based responses. Yet councils cannot deliver transformative health and wellbeing outcomes in isolation. Achieving sustainable change demands shared leadership – across all levels of government, alongside private sector partners, community organisations and the broader health system. Councils are an essential partner in this collective effort, helping to connect local insights with State and Federal priorities and ensuring solutions are grounded in community reality.

St Lukes has a vision to make Tasmania the healthiest island on the planet by 2050, and we believe councils play an important role in this ambitious endeavour. Our perspective is grounded in decades of experience working across Tasmania’s public and private health systems, the community sector, and wellbeing industries. We have a holistic understanding of our state’s most pressing health challenges and the social determinants that drive them.

Over the past two years, St Lukes has invested more than \$18 million in programs that align with the preventative health and wellbeing objectives councils are increasingly embracing. These initiatives demonstrate the power of local, community-driven solutions – an approach that mirrors the intent of the Bill to embed community engagement and wellbeing into strategic planning frameworks.

Tasmania faces stark health inequities, particularly in rural and regional areas where life expectancy can vary by 20 years between suburbs. Chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease remain prevalent, but are lifestyle-related and preventable.

Councils, supported by clear legislative mandates and collaborative partnerships, can lead transformative change by creating environments that make healthy choices easier and more accessible. We believe the proposed reforms, particularly those strengthening councils’ strategic direction-setting through community engagement, provide an opportunity to formalise health and wellbeing as core business for local government.

Commendation of amendments

St Lukes acknowledges the comprehensive consultation undertaken in the development of the Bill – Exposure Draft. The purpose of our submission is to formally support relevant targeted amendments in the Bill that will enable councils to play a more active role in our vision to make Tasmania the healthiest island on the planet, namely Section 19A and Section 70DA.

Section 19A

St Lukes strongly commends the inclusion of Section 19A, which recognises the role of councils to: *'support and improve the wellbeing of the community by (a) harnessing and building on the unique strengths and capabilities of the community'*.

This provision is a vital acknowledgment that the wellbeing of regional communities is a core responsibility of local government, noting that local government cannot deliver this in isolation of the responsibilities of State and Federal governments, and the broader community.

As an example, our community partnership with Devonport City Council exemplifies what is possible when government and private organisations work together. Through a formal Memorandum of Understanding, we will establish a wellness hub within the city's sporting precinct. This will be the first collaborative wellness hub of its kind in Tasmania – a major step forward in our mission to make Tasmania the healthiest island on the planet. Building on the success of our Hobart and Launceston St Lukes wellness hubs, we will embed proven strategies and learnings to extend our reach to Devonport, surrounding communities, and across the North-West.

The location of the hub within a vibrant sporting complex (co-funded by all levels of government) presents a unique opportunity to engage people who might otherwise not actively participate in their own health and wellbeing. Whether they are family members on the sidelines or young people not involved in a team, the hub will help identify and close those gaps. It will be a welcoming, inclusive space offering free health and wellbeing initiatives – from movement sessions and nutrition workshops to mental health support and opportunities for social connection.

The wellness hub will complement and enhance Devonport City Council's *Living Well Devonport Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, which promotes movement and connection through free community events. This strategy is a standout example of how local government can lead meaningful change. By harnessing and building on the unique strengths and capabilities of its community, the Council has created a model that should inspire other councils across Tasmania.

This forward-thinking approach was also a key reason St Lukes chose to engage in a community partnership with the Council – our shared commitment to prevention and community-led health solutions made this collaboration a natural fit. Together, we're setting a benchmark for the state, proving what's possible when innovation and local engagement drive wellbeing initiatives. Moving forward, we are excited to amplify these efforts by adding new offerings within the hub and through outreach programs.

The community partnership will deliver tangible outcomes for the North-West and provide a model for service delivery for other councils in Tasmania.

It also aligns closely with the State Government's 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy, which recognises that health does not start in hospitals, it begins in our homes, parks, schools, community organisations, clubs, and on the sidelines of sporting fields.

Section 70DA

St Lukes also welcomes Section 70DA, which requires councils to: *'establish and implement a strategy for engagement with the community when developing (the council's) plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its major activities'*. Stakeholder input is critical to effective planning and decision-making and there is a growing expectation from communities to have their say on the issues that affect their lives.

Meaningful engagement ensures health and wellbeing priorities reflect the lived realities of local people and that initiatives are co-designed for maximum impact. St Lukes understands this firsthand. Over time, our members' expectations have evolved from simply providing insurance cover when they need it, to supporting them to stay well. This has required a diversification of our core business services, and a pivot in the way we engage with our Tasmanian membership and the wider community.

Through community engagement, we have learned that health and wellbeing is a two-way street: it thrives when individuals take proactive steps for their own health, and when we, as a provider and a community, create the right support systems to make those steps easier and more accessible.

The flow-on benefits of a healthy community are far-reaching for councils, including increased productivity and a healthier local economy, more vibrant public spaces that encourage social interaction, which in turn attracts more people to our regions and generates tourism opportunities.

Local government therefore has an opportunity to play an influential role in advocating, educating, and enabling preventative health strategies that strengthen community resilience and foster social cohesion and general wellbeing. These strategies are particularly important in vulnerable regions where chronic disease burdens are high.

A clear vision and holistic planning are key – councils should be co-designers, not just implementers, in regional health strategies. Past planning missteps, such as approving fast-food outlets near schools, highlight the need for thoughtful, health-focused decisions.

Councils also have access to valuable local health data and insights and can tailor interventions to reflect community needs. They should consider where they can have the most positive impact, whether through direct action or by attracting partners to their regions. Partnership initiatives could include future wellness hubs activations in partnership with St Lukes, school-based programs and health-focused developments.

Our investment in St Lukes wellness hubs in Launceston and Hobart demonstrates the power of community engagement. These hubs offer programs in movement, nutrition and social connection, and have engaged more than 30,000 Tasmanians to date.

Through this journey, we have learned that the more regional the setting, the greater the need, and the stronger the community participation.

Conclusion

St Lukes strongly supports the intent of embedding health and wellbeing as well as more robust community engagement into the legislative framework for Tasmanian local government.

The proposed provisions in the Bill, particularly Sections 19A and 70DA, recognise councils' unique capacity to influence the social determinants of health and foster resilient, thriving communities.

However, local government cannot do this work alone. Improving community wellbeing requires shared accountability, strong partnerships and sustainable investment across State and Federal governments, community organisations, and the private and not-for-profit sectors. With the right legislative framework and the right partnerships, councils can play a powerful role in delivering coordinated, preventative health strategies that benefits their communities.

We encourage the Tasmanian Government to ensure these reforms are implemented in a way that empowers councils to act as collaborative leaders, supported by robust engagement frameworks, strategic planning tools and the financial capacity to undertake its responsibilities.

St Lukes stands ready to partner with councils across the state to deliver innovative, community-driven solutions, such as wellness hubs and preventative health programs, which make healthy choices easier and more accessible for all Tasmanians, building healthier communities and improving our quality of life.