Country cancer services are an integral part of South Australia’s statewide cancer services, providing country cancer patients with access to treatment outside of Adelaide hospitals.

There are chemotherapy units in a range of country hospitals across the state, with staff trained and accredited to provide chemotherapy treatment and other services for cancer patients.

The services available at country chemotherapy units are being expanded so that more country cancer patients can receive treatment closer to home.

**Additional staff**

**Double the number of medium complexity country chemotherapy units**

**New GP oncologist role**
There are 15 chemotherapy units in hospitals across country South Australia. Each unit has between one and six chemotherapy chairs, with 65 chairs in total across country South Australia. Staff are trained and accredited to provide chemotherapy treatment and other supportive services for cancer patients such as chemotherapy education and central venous access device maintenance. The units are also equipped with Digital Telehealth Network facilities so that some medical appointments may be held with specialists based in Adelaide.

Since the units opened, demand for country cancer services has increased significantly, with a 70% increase in chemotherapy activity in country South Australia reported over the last five years.

In September 2018, the State Government announced additional funding of $6.9 million over four years for Country Health SA to deliver additional chemotherapy services in regional areas.

Country Health SA has developed a plan to expand country cancer services, which will be implemented in stages over four years.

Additional staff are being employed to support the operation of the chemotherapy units, including more medical oncologists, clinical pharmacists, cancer care coordinator nurses and administration staff. One of these medical oncologists, Professor Sankha Mitra, has been appointed as Clinical Director of Cancer Services for Country Health SA.
Chemotherapy units in SA Health are classified as low, medium or high complexity based on the services available at that site.

Up until recently, the chemotherapy units at Whyalla, Mount Gambier and Port Pirie have been the only country sites classified to administer medium and low complexity chemotherapy, while those at Ceduna, Clare, Gawler, Kangaroo Island, Mount Barker, Murray Bridge, Naracoorte, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln, Riverland, Victor Harbor and Wallaroo have been classified to administer low complexity chemotherapy only.

The number of medium complexity country chemotherapy units are being doubled, from three to six, by transitioning the units in the South Coast District Hospital in Victor Harbor, the Riverland General Hospital in Berri, and the Port Lincoln Hospital to medium complexity units.

A new GP oncologist role will be piloted in consultation with rural GPs. This will involve a rural GP advanced training program in medical oncology where one or more GPs will support country chemotherapy units, with additional support and supervision from a medical oncologist available via the Digital Telehealth Network.
Recently, Country Health SA has been working with Professor Chris Karapetis from the Flinders Centre for Innovation in Cancer to trial the use of medium complexity chemotherapy at the South Coast District Hospital in Victor Harbor.

“By working together and supporting the team at the South Coast District Hospital, we can now administer medium complexity chemotherapy there safely and effectively,” Professor Karapetis said.

“Patients can get up in the morning, have breakfast, go and have treatment, and get back home in time for lunch.”

Helen (pictured on the cover) is one of the people who have already benefited by being able to receive medium complexity chemotherapy treatment at the South Coast District Hospital.

“Having that little bit of control back in the home, and making sure that my son could still keep his routine, helped the whole household, and that kept him happy, which kept me less stressed,” Helen said.

“We wouldn’t have been able to do that if I had to go to Flinders Medical Centre for treatment.”

“The staff here have been wonderful. They make you feel like you’re the only one — even if all the chairs are full, you’re the only one they’re helping at that moment.”

Expanding country cancer services will ensure that more people like Helen receive treatment and care closer to home.

For more information, go to www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/countrycancerservices

Country cancer services are supported by funding from the Government of South Australia and the Australian Government.