

Save Wee Waa Hospital Committee (sub 95)

1. What could be done to better improve communication between Hunter NE Health District Management, local hospitals, medical professionals and the community of the Hunter New England Health District?

Re-establishing the Hospital Advisory Board is crucial to improving communication. At present, there is no clear or consistent channel between HNEH and the Wee Waa community. Regular meetings—at least every three months—must be held to be effective. These meetings cannot simply be opportunities for HNEH to inform the community of predetermined decisions; they must provide space for genuine two-way discussion, with community ideas and feedback actively considered and incorporated into decision-making. Importantly, all local medical and health professionals, including the pharmacist, should be invited to attend, ensuring that issues are raised, discussed, and acted upon in a timely and collaborative way.

2. Are there improvements that could be made to the delivery of NSW Ambulance services that would better support the health outcomes of residents of the regional and remote areas of the Hunter NE Health District? Please share specific examples if you have them.

The NSW Ambulance service plays a vital role in transporting patients to hospital in an emergency. For this to be effective, there must be a hospital available locally, 24 hours a day. Having Wee Waa Hospital closed overnight, for example, is not a safe or viable option. Hospitals must remain open 24/7 so that Ambulance officers can transport patients quickly and safely, ensuring they are then available in the community to respond to the next emergency. At present, Ambulance officers are forced to undertake long journeys—sometimes five-hour round trips—to transport patients. This leaves entire communities exposed and vulnerable without timely emergency support.

3. Do you think that there should be more than 2 board members representing the New England/Narrabri part of the HNE Area Health Service District and could this be achieved by adding an extra position? What are the merits of potentially doing this?

Representation on the Board is critical to ensuring that all areas within the District have their voices heard, including Narrabri. However, the solution is not to simply add another position, which only increases bureaucracy without guaranteeing a genuine voice for our communities. The real issue is the imbalance in representation, with the Board currently far too Hunter/Upper Hunter-centric. A total restructure is needed so that no more than 55% of representatives come from the Hunter, with the remainder drawn from New England and the North West. This would ensure fairer and more equitable representation across the District. Every community, particularly those on the edges, must have access to safe emergency and hospital care and a genuine opportunity to raise concerns. It should be mandated that the Board includes at least one representative from each area, guaranteeing all communities are heard and that the Board works closely with them to address local health challenges.