

12 October 2023

Dr Joe McGirr  
Committee Chair  
Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health  
Email: [remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Dr McGirr,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to workforce issues, workplace culture and funding considerations for remote, rural and regional health.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) is the medical college responsible for the training and professional development of ophthalmologists in Australia and New Zealand. We seek to enhance equitable service provision across Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas, and develop and maintain a sustainable ophthalmology workforce with the ultimate goal of eliminating avoidable blindness.

RANZCO previously made a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on *Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional, and remote New South Wales*, and highlighted issues around ophthalmology workforce shortage and maldistribution, and inequitable access to quality eye health care, in rural and regional compared with urban areas. RANZCO is supportive of many recommendations outlined in the Portfolio Committee No. 2 report following the Inquiry, particularly the following:

- We fully support that NSW Health undertake a review of the current funding models for all rural and regional Local Health Districts (LHDs) to identify and quantify the existing service delivery gaps and provide any recommendations for funding increases.

For ophthalmology, public hospital-funded outpatient services are not available in the majority of regional, rural and remote LHDs and are inadequate to meet the population needs where they are funded.

Additionally, ophthalmic surgical services cannot be safely delivered at individual rural and remote centres. Patients need sustainable travel and accommodation assistance, so they can travel to regional centres to access safe surgical ophthalmic specialist care.

RANZCO and our members are keen to collaborate with NSW Health to develop a clear strategy to strengthen and fund the growth of sustainable rural, regional and remote health services. High-value, cost-effective collaborative models of care (MOC) that include both asynchronous and synchronous telehealth MOC should be considered in the development of this strategy.

With our active advocacy work, [Vision 2030 and beyond](#) and broad engagement across the eye healthcare sector, RANZCO is well-placed to take a lead role in working with NSW Health to develop this strategy and has documented the MOCs in use across Australia and the evidence supporting them.

These MOCs maximise the utilisation of upskilled ophthalmology-trained nurses, nurse practitioners and allied health professionals.

RANZCO has identified that a hub-spoke MOC, with lower-cost staff working across regional, rural and remote NSW at appropriately appointed and equipped spoke locations, and being supported by hubs in larger regional centres and adjacent urban areas would enable cost-effective and efficient service delivery.

To support telehealth MOC, each spoke location will require well-trained staff and the essential equipment needed to deliver patient information and diagnostic images.

- Sustainably addressing workforce maldistribution is key to equitable regional, rural and remote service delivery.

Recruiting and retaining existing regional workforce by ensuring rural and remote medical and health workforce recruitment and retention strategies are both effective and in place across all regional LHDs is key.

Also crucial is graduating specialists with a higher likelihood of longer-term regional practice. To this end, RANZCO has established the Regionally Enhanced Training Network in NSW, where trainees will spend the majority of their training time in rural and regional centres, increasing the likelihood they will stay and practice in rural and regional areas after training.

RANZCO strongly supports the review of the rural trainees' remuneration and incentives, to support trainees' relocation/secondment to regional facilities.

Notably, RANZCO awards points for regionality in our national selection process. This will result in a greater proportion of our workforce having regional roots and these individuals are 3 times more times to undertake longer-term regional practice.

- Building a local Indigenous workforce at every level with proper funding support is also critical to enhance access to eye healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

RANZCO has introduced many initiatives to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors to pursue ophthalmology as a career and offers financial and professional support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees who are currently in our Vocational Training Program.

- RANZCO agrees that all workplaces should provide staff with a supportive environment and good working conditions, and make sure they are motivated, well remunerated, trained, and supported.

RANZCO looks forward to working with NSW Health, our members and other stakeholders to make progress in implementing those recommendations.

Should you have any questions or need further information, please contact Ms Legend Lee, Senior Manager, Policy and Advocacy at [REDACTED]

Kind regards



Mark Carmichael  
RANZCO CEO