

**Submission
No 35**

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE No. 2
RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE DELIVERY OF SPECIFIC HEALTH
SERVICES AND SPECIALIST CARE IN REMOTE, RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW**

Organisation: The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
(RANZCO)

Date Received: 23 April 2024

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

Dear Dr McGirr,

RE - The implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to the delivery of specific health services and specialist care in remote, rural and regional NSW

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.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to health outcomes and access to health and hospital services.

RANZCO supports many of the recommendations of the Portfolio Committee No. 2 report and would like to provide the Committee with the following information on the implementation of specific recommendations relevant to ophthalmology, as follows:

Recommendation 1 - *That NSW Health review the current funding models for all rural and regional Local Health Districts in order to identify any service delivery gaps and provide any recommendations for funding increases.*

RANZCO is not aware of any progress that has been made in this area. As outlined in our submission to the Inquiry into Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional, and remote New South Wales, we support a review of the current funding models for all rural and regional Local Health Districts (LHDs) and 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.

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, most large outer urban public hospitals in Greater Sydney do not deliver a comprehensive ophthalmology service. Examples of this are Campbelltown, Wollongong, and Nepean Hospitals all of which have no ophthalmic outpatient services. Outpatient service delivery represents 80 percent of ophthalmic service delivery and timely access prevents more than 95% of permanent visual impairment and blindness from common chronic conditions that are more prevalent in older Australians, such as glaucoma, age related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. The development of comprehensive

public hospital ophthalmology services in outer urban Sydney would greatly increase access to services for patients living in the surrounding regional areas, reducing the requirement for regional patients to travel into central Sydney to access services. This would also take pressure off overburdened central city services that commonly have exhausted their physical footprint and have no further room to expand. Outer urban services would also provide the opportunity to delivery hub and spoke services into adjacent regional areas.

There is ample published evidence to support the cost effectiveness of timely access to eye healthcare. This is not surprising given visual impairment and blindness increase the rate of falls, road traffic accidents, dementia progression, the requirement for assisting living, depression, etcetera.

In the development of outer urban services, RANZCO would welcome the opportunity to share our knowledge of high-value, cost-effective collaborative models of care (MOC), including both asynchronous and synchronous telehealth MOC, which would support the efficient delivery of ophthalmology services to rural and regional NSW.

RANZCO recommends that NSW Health considers funding the pilot for an outer urban collaborative care clinic using these developed and evidenced MOC.

***Recommendation 11** - That NSW Health work with the Australian Government collaboratively to immediately invest in the development and implementation of a 10-Year Rural and Remote Medical and Health Workforce Recruitment and Retention Strategy.*

In response to the ongoing maldistribution of the ophthalmic workforce, RANZCO has had engagement with NSW Health to establish 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.

Two rurally enhanced training pathways have been inaugurated in NSW, targeting the workforce-poor areas of Tamworth and Orange. To fully realise these pathways, RANZCO requires additional support from NSW Health to fund additional specialist and support staff FTE at Westmead Children's Ophthalmology Department and Liverpool Ophthalmology Department. With an ageing regional workforce, and therefore an ageing pool of potential supervisors, there is an urgent need to act with support from NSW Health.

General Practitioners (GPs) and Rural Generalists (RGs) play a vital role in providing community primary care and hospital-based care in many rural and remote communities. Recognising their potential and expanding their scope of practice through appropriate training and upskilling in non-GP specialties is an important step forward to optimize the Australian medical workforce and to improve service delivery.

RANZCO is currently collaborating with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) on a pilot program in Queensland to upskill GPs and RGs in performing Intravitreal Injection in areas where ophthalmology service is not accessible. If successful, RANZCO would like to expand the upskilling program to rural, remote and regional areas in NSW.


We are not aware of any other actions by NSW Health to implement this recommendation in relation to the ophthalmology workforce, such as reviewing rural trainees' remuneration and incentives.

Recommendation 14 - *That NSW Health work with the Australian Government, the Primary Health Networks, the university sector and the specialist medical colleges to increase rural GP and specialist training positions, integrating these within the new employment and service delivery models recommended in Recommendations 9 and 10.*

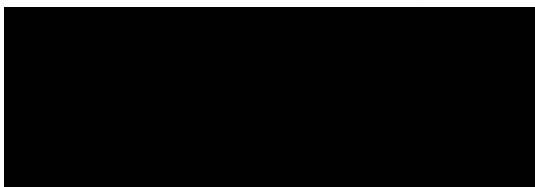
[Australia's Future Health Workforce Report - Ophthalmology](#) identified an impending shortage of ophthalmologists by 2025 without growth in training positions. In response, RANZCO has been advocating for creation of additional training positions. The key limitation has been a lack of funding in public hospitals for the additional space, clinics and operating lists required to support new trainees and the lack of comprehensive ophthalmology service delivery in most of regional NSW. The development of outer urban eye healthcare services, that incorporate high value collaborative models of care, would facilitate the growth of the ophthalmology training posts needed to deliver a sustainable ophthalmic workforce for NSW, whilst increasing access to eye healthcare services closer for outer urban and regional patients.

RANZCO is keen to collaborate with NSW Health to investigate solutions to increase training positions in public hospitals and in regional areas and consider measures to optimise ophthalmology training in NSW.

RANZCO hopes that this information is useful to the Committee and 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 

Kind regards



Mark Carmichael
RANZCO CEO