

**Submission
No 59**

**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: Aspen Medical NSW

Date Received: 1 May 2024

01/05/2024

Re: Inquiry into specific health services and specialist care in remote, rural and regional NSW

Dr. McGirr MP and associated committee members,

Aspen Medical appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the discussion following the findings from the NSW Government Inquiry into rural and remote healthcare. The report from May 2022 has raised some necessary and valuable commentary around the challenges and possible resolutions for health outcomes to rural, regional and remote areas. Drawing from our extensive experience in healthcare service delivery, we propose a series of actionable strategies designed to enhance healthcare outcomes, which we are fully prepared to support in their implementation alongside the NSW Government.

Background

Patients in rural, regional, and remote areas experience significantly poorer health outcomes, higher incidence of chronic diseases, and increased rates of premature deaths compared to their urban counterparts. This disparity is due in part to difficulties in accessing nearby healthcare, financial burdens associated with seeking diagnosis and treatment, and a lack of accessible specialist services in these areas. Activity-based funding models often fall short in addressing the unique challenges faced by rural and remote providers, which are marginally viable under such financial structures. As such, Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) offer the means to quickly fill the gaps and ensure continuity in access to care for rural, regional, and remote communities.

Establishment of Managed Workforces and Project Offices

Drawing from our experiences in operating the Rural Locum Assistance Program (LAP), Remote Area Health Corp, and Surge Workforce Capabilities on behalf of the Federal Government during the pandemic, Aspen Medical has successfully demonstrated how managed rural and remote services coordinated from centralised project offices can support healthcare delivery in rural settings. Based upon our experience in effectively managing surge workforces, we believe that this model could be utilised to provide services to rural, remote and regional areas to address chronic shortages and improve delivery.

We recommend the establishment of dedicated funding pools specifically for regional project offices that would oversee the deployment and operation of healthcare services in rural & remote regions. By allocating funds directly to private organisations to operate these project offices in collaboration with NSW Health and the relevant LHDs, the government will tangibly demonstrate its commitment to improving health outcomes. This pooled funding approach circumvents the limitations imposed by activity-based funding. Essentially, demonstrating the overall budget in this way can act as a strategic funding tool to provide a viable, appealing alternative for service providers who might otherwise be disincentivised by the existing funding models such as the MBS.

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Deployment of Mobile Health Units:

The strategic deployment of mobile health units, including surgical and haemodialysis units with satellite capabilities, can quickly and efficiently address healthcare access issues in rural, regional, and remote New South Wales. By deploying mobile health units, communities can gain immediate access to healthcare in order to address gaps and support the longer-term process of establish permanent health infrastructure.

To address the viability concerns associated with the current activity-based funding model in these under-resourced areas, Aspen Medical believes that a targeted funding approach for mobile health units would provide more access to care for people in Modified Monash 3-7. Mobile health units can rapidly provide essential services, reducing health disparities, particularly in remote and Indigenous communities. Financially, this approach is supported by our projections showing potential cost recoveries of the up-front funding through the Medicare benefits schedule, making it a viable solution. Additionally, this could serve as a pilot for expanding telehealth capabilities, such as satellite-assisted dialysis or remote complex wound care.

Virtual Health Pilots Targeted at Needs of Rural & Remote NSW

As a key provider to the Healthdirect service, Aspen Medical is uniquely positioned to implement specific pilot programs that target key identified groups in these areas. For instance, initiating a pilot for a 'hospital in the home' service that interlinks remote patient monitoring, a satellite haemodialysis service, or a specialised wound care program that utilises, all of which have shown effectiveness in past implementations throughout the state.

Trialling specific virtual health services would not only enhance the reach and efficiency of healthcare delivery but also provide frameworks for sustainable model of care that minimise the need for travel, reducing the financial and time burdens on patients. This approach can further support the 'hub and spoke' model of healthcare currently being implement. Ultimately it will contribute to a more accessible healthcare system, that ensures residents in rural, regional, and remote areas receive timely and appropriate medical attention.

Mobilisation of International Health Workforce through Strategic Partnerships

Based on our experience in integrating global health professionals, we recommend a strategic plan specific to different Modified Monash areas, to mobilise international medical staff to mitigate local shortages, that revolves around ensuring quality and cultural compatibility. We believe that this approach would benefit from partnerships with industry entities that have operations in both Australia and potential source countries, like Indonesia, enhancing staff quality and process efficiency. Provision of Patient Transport Services: Our capabilities in managing patient transport solutions can be adapted to reduce the dependency on emergency services for non-urgent transport, alleviating pressure on resources like Ambulance NSW.

Opening Provider Panels and schemes

To cultivate a more competitive and dynamic healthcare sector, we recommend that the NSW government consider opening up specific provider panels and schemes for remote, rural and regional healthcare services. This policy would foster competition, drive innovation and ensure best value for money for the relevant regions.

Aspen Medical stands ready to assist the NSW Government in any capacity to implement any recommendations from the inquiry. Our commitment is not only to suggest solutions but also to be an active partner in enhancing healthcare across rural, regional, and remote New South Wales. We believe these strategies will make significant improvements in health outcomes for underserved communities, and we are eager to support their execution with our resources and expertise.

Kind regards,

Aspen Medical



Sean Costello
Manager, Global Client Solutions

