

**Submission  
No 64**

**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:** Coolamon Shire Council

**Date Received:** 2 April 2024

Please contact

Council Ref. Mr Tony Donoghue

Your Ref. TD:ACC:H.03-01, SC223



T: 02 6930 1800

F: 02 6927 3168

PO Box 101, Coolamon NSW 2701

E: [council@coolamon.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@coolamon.nsw.gov.au)

W: [www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au](http://www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au)

ABN: 32 573 173 265

2 April 2024

The Chair  
Select Committee Remote, Rural and Regional Health  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Dear,

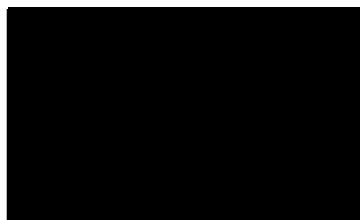
**Re: Portfolio Committee No. 2 Relating to the delivery of Specific Health Services and Specialist Care in Remote, Rural and Regional NSW**

Coolamon Shire Council made a submission to the initial enquiry regarding the Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health, please find attached.

We were honoured to be able to speak to this submission in person at Parliament House on 24 November 2023.

Our submission and statements related primarily around Aged Care provision and how that impacts our community. As the Portfolio Committee No. 2 focuses on this specific area we would ask that the Committee take into consideration our previous submission in regard to this topic.

Should you require any further information we are happy to provide it upon request.



Tony Donoghue  
**General Manager**

**From:** [Clr David McCann](#)  
**To:** [remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au)  
**Cc:** [records](#)  
**Subject:** Submission to Select Committee on Remote Rural & Regional Health  
**Date:** Friday, 15 September 2023 4:23:44 PM  
**Attachments:** [8EA6601C1FC84364BBBD07FFAA8303A5\[11017623\].jpg](#)  
[B986865867FF427B9609C99434DDFCF4\[11017624\].png](#)  
[LGNSW Support.PDF](#)

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Dr Joe McGirr  
Chair, Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Email: [remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:remoteruralregionalhealth@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Joe,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Select committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health. As you are no doubt well aware, Coolamon Shire Council is heavily invested in achieving positive health outcomes for our community and it is pleasing to see that this enquiry is focusing much needed attention on the Health Sector in remote, rural and regional NSW. In relation to the 22 findings of the Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales report (Legislative Council Report 57) of May 2022 (the report), I do not propose to address each finding individually, suffice to say that many of them have identified the very real issue of the lack of staff and qualified practitioners in communities outside metropolitan centres.

However, it is also noted that of the 44 recommendations made in the report there is no mention of the current or potential role that local government plays in supporting the provision of health services in remote, rural or regional NSW. I hope to expand on this by explaining how Coolamon Shire Council approaches this issue.

I must point out that the report provides little reference to aged care, and does not include aged care as an emerging health issue, however as nine (9) remote, rural and regional councils provide this essential service for their communities I believe it must be considered as part of any review of services. It is understood that the Federal Government has the primary responsibility in this sector, but as I am sure you are well aware, the aged care sector is confronted with the same problems confronting NSW Health. Pleasingly, recommendations 23 and 24 do identify the need to improve the provision of palliative care services and calls for an innovative approach to end of life care. The close working relationships that Coolamon Shire Council has developed with the Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) has, from council's standpoint made significant steps forward which may provide a road map for other similar sized communities in NSW and worthy of consideration by NSW Health.

In most remote, rural communities in particular, without council's involvement in aged care, this essential service would not be available to these communities. Primarily because it would not be cost effective for commercial providers to operate and maintain the facilities in small communities. Without local councils stepping up and taking on responsibility for aged care, elderly residents are forced into care many miles from their families and community. The only alternative to aged care is for residents to be admitted to hospital which obviously increased the already strained NSW Health system. I would contend that local government has not been

recognised for its major role in the provision of aged care services and this has contributed to the financial and legislative burden on councils being generally overlooked by previous inquiries.

Since Covid19, Coolamon Shire Council has undertaken an extensive recruiting process for both Aged Care employees and Registered Nurses. This has been driven primarily by changes to the Federal Aged Care Act, but also by difficulties in retaining staff who have moved away from the sector. The lack of staff forced council to close 12 beds of our facility at Allawah Lodge and staffing has prevented council from reopening these beds post pandemic, despite a waiting list of seventy five. To maintain the facility at 22 beds is financially unviable for council on the longer term so our number one priority has been recruitment of suitable staff. Council has been forced to use agency staff to fill roster shortfalls, provide staff leave, training etc., which has also contributed to financial strain on council's budget. Despite this, council is committed to maintaining our aged care facilities and will shortly welcome 10 new staff members from the Philippines.

While the overseas staff will be most welcome and their arrival will allow council to return Allawah Lodge to full capacity of 33 beds, the process for recruiting them has been lengthy and at times, frustrating. The complexity of Australia's immigration procedures have been challenging but of more concern has been the apparent disparity in recognition of qualifications. Of the 10 overseas workers council has engaged as aged care workers, six are already trained nurses, however their Pilipino qualifications are not recognised in Australia, despite their training being aligned to that provided by the United States of America.

Council has resolved to fund additional training to equip these employees with the skills to upgrade their qualifications in line with Australian standards because it is the right thing to do. We hope that these employees will seek employment commensurate with their skills in health facilities in NSW once their engagement with council is completed. This is a small but positive example of how local government can assist in workforce development. Council has also undertaken construction of accommodation for these employees and will continue to support them to integrate into our community.

You are aware of council's advocacy for upgraded health facilities in Coolamon in line with the MLHD Coolamon-Ganmain Health Service Plan dated November 2022. The plan provides an outstanding opportunity to significantly enhance health service delivery in the Coolamon Shire. It also demonstrates the exciting possibilities of further integration of health and aged care services in small remote and rural communities in NSW which will meet the future needs of all age groups in the community. The plan created by MLHD demonstrates what can be achieved by thinking outside the box and council has been pleased to work with MLHD on this exciting concept.

Council is aware of the many issues which confront NSW Health and is ready and willing to work with the State Government to achieve positive health outcomes. As part of our commitment to the Coolamon-Ganmain Health Service Plan, council will purchase the land to construct the new facility and convert the old hospital into aged care accommodation. Council also intends to construct further longer term accommodation options for staff to occupy either on a transient or longer term basis. Council is very supportive of your views on training health professionals in regional areas and we are willing to engage with training providers to explore the necessary services such as accommodation, spousal employment etc., to facilitate greater use of the Coolamon MPS as a viable training option. Council feels that our proximity to Wagga Wagga

would complement such training.

Investment of the kind detailed in the Coolamon-Ganmain Health Service Plan is essential for rural communities along with a council willing to invest in aged care is a model which solve a great many issues in remote and regional NSW.


Local government has a significant role to play in addressing health service and workforce needs in NSW and this can be achieved by recognition of the roles council can play in supporting NSW Health in the provision of these services but this will require investment by the State Government and a willingness on the part of councils to consider the community benefits of smaller locally based aged care facilities co-located as much as possible to existing health services and a commitment to ongoing training of employees to enable them to move into other roles offered by NSW Health. This concept I believe aligned with Recommendation 22 which suggests; *...NSW Health and the rural and regional Local Health Districts work with the Primary Health Networks and other partners to promote improved communication between service providers, including through the use of shared medical record systems, in order to ensure continuity of care for patients.*

Coolamon Shire Council has made previous submissions on this issue. I have attached relevant documents which provide an insight into the significant contribution made by local government in the health sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health . It is imperative that local government has a seat at the table in the discussion around remote, rural and regional health and I look forward to further discussions with you in the future.

Yours' Sincerely,

David McCann, OAM, OAM(MIL)  
Mayor  
Coolamon Shire Council

  
W [www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au](http://www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au)

55 Cowabbie Street (PO Box 101) COOLAMON NSW 2701