

**Submission
No 96**

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (SPLITTING OF THE HUNTER NEW ENGLAND HEALTH DISTRICT) BILL 2025

Organisation: RiverBank Youth Works Ltd

Date Received: 6 May 2025



30/04/2025

Dear NSW Parliament (Splitting Hunter New England Health District Bill) Committee,

RiverBank Youth Works Ltd wish to submit an endorsement of the splitting of Hunter New England Health District into two separate health services. We believe that a health district based in a rural area is better suited to make decisions that best support rural communities to receive the best possible health care outcomes as they are better situated to understand the differing needs of rural communities.

If we may offer an example, please consider Wee Waa Hospital. At the time of writing this submission, it is approaching two years since Wee Waa Hospital has offered emergency care outside of “business hours”. As an organization working with disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, we believe that this is unacceptable and find it difficult to find any coherent logic behind the continued lack of action to rectify this. Our next closest hospital, with an emergency department open beyond 6pm, is at least a 29 minute drive away, if the emergency requiring attention occurs in town. Communities further west of Wee Waa but serviced by Wee Waa Hospital, such as Pilliga, already have a distance of 50km to travel to an emergency department, and so, after 6pm, now have an hour to travel before they reach emergency care.

In some situations a 29 minute drive doesn’t make a lot of difference. If you don’t have ready access to a roadworthy vehicle, as is the case with many of the young people we work with, it will be the difference between life and death. As an organisation working with power tools and troubled youth, we’re very careful to operate in as safe a manner as possible and have been fortunate enough not so have needed emergency services as yet. However, as we listen to the activities that our young people engage in when not under our direct care, i.e. not during our emergency department’s operating hours, we are preparing ourselves for the day when we sit beside our young people and help them to cope with the preventable loss of their mate/s.

If you’re thinking to yourselves that this is where an ambulance service would step in, you’re correct. However, our local ambulance service is often called away to other communities and could be up to three hours away. This is the reality of living in rural communities that Hunter New England Health doesn’t seem to understand and yet are the ones in charge of providing for such communities. It doesn’t make sense, and is going to cost lives.

In conclusion, we urge you to split Hunter New England Health District and (re)provide a Health District based in a rural area that better understands the needs of rural communities and so provide our rural community with the best possible health service it can have, before a Health District that is currently failing us claims any more lives.

Sincerely,

Christian “Chippy” Petersen
Founder, RiverBank Youth Works Ltd.