

**Submission
No 2**

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF DRUG
REHABILITATION SERVICES IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND
REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Dubbo Regional Council

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**DUBBO REGIONAL
COUNCIL**

**OFFICE OF MAYOR
CLR BEN SHIELDS**

14 November 2017

The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC
Chairman
Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health and Community Services Legislative Council
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2830
Via Email: portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF DRUG REHABILITATION SERVICES
IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE NSW**

As the newly elected Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council I welcome the opportunity to make a submission in regards to the provision of drug rehabilitation services for the region and to also invite the Committee to hold a hearing in the Dubbo Regional Council area.

A hearing in the Dubbo LGA will enable community members to interact directly with the Committee and articulate their insights into their need for access to a drug rehabilitation service. This is particularly important when considering the needs of the Aboriginal community who suffer disproportionately from the association between drug/ alcohol issues and crime. Many Aboriginal people are unwilling or unable to leave their community in order to interact with government agencies let alone a body such as a Parliamentary Committee.

Professional sectors that interact with those affected by drug and alcohol addiction in Dubbo and the wider Region have, since 2013, been actively lobbying government in regards to the lack of any drug rehabilitation service in the Dubbo district. The stakeholders formed the Integrated Project Group whose membership consisted of representatives from Orana Law Society, Legal Aid NSW, Office of the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions, Aboriginal Legal Service Dubbo, Western NSW Community Legal Centre, NSW Local Courts Administration, Community Corrections NSW, Justice Health and the Western NSW Local Health District.

This grassroots collaboration in itself illustrates the level of concern at the significant gap in drug rehabilitation services and the subsequent inability for courts in Western NSW and Dubbo to have capacity to impose sentences which require admission and participation in appropriate local residential rehabilitation programs.



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The Dubbo Regional Council area is experiencing an increasing prevalence of interrelated drug, alcohol and mental health problems. The lack, however, of local services and less than optimal service alignment means people are not be getting the treatment they need. Releasing offenders without addressing rehabilitation merely entrenches recidivism.

Methamphetamine related hospitalisations in Western NSW Primary Health Networks have risen from approximately five hospitalisations per 100,000 in 2008/2009 to approximately 110 per 100,000 in 2015/2016. The most significant increase in these hospitalisations has been from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016. This period saw an increase from 10 hospitalisations per 100,000 to 110 hospitalisations per 100,000.

During the period from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016, Dubbo saw an increase in the crime of possession and/or use of cannabis of 7.9% and an increase of 40.3% in the crime of possession and/or use of amphetamines during the same period.

A drug and alcohol rehabilitation service is also the keystone project that would enable a Drug Court to be established in Dubbo. In this regard it should be noted that at its Ordinary Meeting of 23 October 2017, Council resolved to seek the implementation of a drug court and a residential rehabilitation centre amongst other social justice concerns.

I have been advised by the Western NSW Local Health District that the following facilities exist in the region:

- Youth – Mac River, Dubbo. Rehabilitation facility, eight beds, with generally a three month wait for admission.
- Orana Haven (Brewarrina Aboriginal Corporation) Brewarrina – Rehabilitation male only facility, 18 beds, Aboriginal focus, will take non Aboriginal but general population has to be around 60% Aboriginal due to funding constraints. Generally a two month wait for admission.
- Weigelli, Cowra – Rehabilitation mixed sex facility, 23 beds, Aboriginal focus, will take non Aboriginal but general population has to be around 60% Aboriginal due to funding constraints. Generally a two month wait for admission.
- Lyndon Community, Orange – Withdrawal mixed sex unit, 12 beds. Generally three month wait.
- Lyndon Community, Orange – Rehabilitation mixed sex facility, 16 beds. Generally three month wait.

The following facilities are proposed:

- Lyndon Community, Orange (opening early 2018) – Women’s and Children’s Rehabilitation facility, maximum eight women and a maximum of two children per woman.
- Lyndon Community (proposed April 2018) – Day Program Rehabilitation facilities, details to be finalised, a program may be located in Dubbo.

As can be seen from the information provided the Dubbo LGA and the region generally does not have either adequate numbers of beds or appropriate access to rehabilitation facilities or withdrawal facilities.

A Drug Court is considered by Council to be a significant tool in the bid to reduce both crime and intergenerational disadvantage. In correspondence from the then Attorney General in July 2015, Council was advised that the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) has conducted two evaluations on the Drug Court. The first evaluation was conducted in 2002 and determined that despite the high drop-out rate of about 40%, the NSW Drug Court Program proved more cost-effective than imprisonment in reducing the number of drug offences and equally cost effective in delaying the onset of further offending. The second evaluation was conducted in 2008 and determined that the NSW Drug Court is more cost-effective than prison in reducing the rate of re-offending among offenders whose crime is drug related.

Without an accessible residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation service the benefits of a Drug Court can never be realised in the Dubbo LGA and broader Western NSW region. Clearly with rising prison populations coupled with high rates of crime that are related to drug and alcohol abuse, maintaining the same approach to service delivery is effectively a decision to maintain the status quo- which is unacceptable to our community.

From an equity perspective the lack of residential drug and alcohol detoxification and treatment facilities in Western NSW and particularly the Dubbo LGA is inequitable. There are many facilities located elsewhere in NSW yet a region that services 120,000 people with high levels of social disadvantage has very limited effective options in this regard.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Ben Shields
Mayor