

**Submission
No 177**

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Medical Council of NSW

Date Received: 9 December 2020



Chair of the inquiry
The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC

Dear Chair

Re: Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales

The Medical Council of NSW operates under the *Health Practitioner National Law (NSW)* and works with the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) to manage complaints about doctors and medical students in NSW. Members are appointed by the Governor of NSW and the Council's work is supported by the staff of the Health Professional Councils Authority (HPCA), a division of the Ministry of Health. The Council's primary purpose is the protection of the public by ensuring registered doctors maintain appropriate professional standards of performance and conduct and remain fit to practice.

The Council will act to protect the public if a doctor may be practising unsafely or placing the public at risk. The Council also recognises the importance of maintaining the trust and confidence of the public in the medical profession and will use its powers in cases of serious crimes and unethical conduct. The Council also plays an important role in ensuring that medical students are fit to have contact with the public in NSW. Frequently the Council imposes conditions on a practitioner's registration. Conditions are designed to protect the public and to enable the Council to monitor compliance and must be complied with if the practitioner wants to continue to practise medicine. Examples of conditions include the type of procedure that may be performed, the type of patient who may be seen, a requirement to work under supervision, or to undertake further education. Most conditions are publicly available on the national [register of practitioners](#), maintained by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Occasionally where the Council considers a doctor's continuing practice poses an immediate and serious risk to public safety or is otherwise in the public interest, the Council may suspend his or her registration pending full investigation by the HCCC.

When dealing with complaints about doctors in rural, regional and remote NSW, the Council is sometimes faced with difficult decisions in what is a complex health care environment that differs from the metropolitan experience. The Council is ever mindful of the need to ensure appropriate professional standards of medical care in all parts of NSW but also careful to ensure it does so with an awareness of the different nature of health care supports in different parts of NSW.

The Council maintains a database and records of complaints received about doctors, including in metropolitan, rural, regional and remote NSW over many years. While the database has technical limitations based on the age and nature of its underpinning technology, the Council may be able to assist the inquiry with details about the breakdown of complaints it has received over time from different parts of NSW. If the inquiry was minded to seek this kind of information, the Council would be happy to respond to such a request, and to assess whether it holds information that could assist the inquiry.

The Council would be pleased to consider such a request, should the inquiry seek to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Sammut
President - Medical Council of NSW