

**Submission
No 205**

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

Name: Mr Peter Leotta
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The Hon. Committee Members “Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales Inquiry”.

Dear Committee Members, I am prompted to make a submission to this inquiry due to the deterioration of medical services in Gulgong and Regional NSW in recent years.

I moved to Gulgong from outer Sydney (Middle Dural) in 1972 to pursue a career in agriculture. The deciding factor was that there was a functioning hospital within six kilometres of my property.

The Gulgong hospital boasted an Emergency ward, an Operating Theatre for minor operations, a Maternity ward, a Children’s ward and Male and Female wards as well as X-Ray facilities. In effect a fully functioning Country hospital providing all services except for major surgical interventions.

Although over the years there was always a disproportionate ratio of patients to doctors, there was always a doctor available at the hospital when there was a medical emergency or a serious accident. In the event that the patient’s condition or injury was beyond the capability of the hospital, the patient was transported to a larger facility such as Mudgee or Dubbo.

Over the years, my parents, my brother, my wife, my children and I have all been patients at the old Gulgong hospital at different times. In 1979 following a catastrophic bushfire which claimed the life of a local youth and destroyed many buildings, property and livestock, the wards were full of injured volunteer firefighters. If a similar catastrophe were to happen now, the MPS would not be able to cope.

The system worked well until 2010 when the State Government decided to close the hospital and replace it with a Health One facility. Through community agitation and the intervention of newly elected State Member, Andrew Gee, the government of the day reluctantly agreed to fund the present MPS and although it is a state-of-the-art facility, it is not a replacement for the old fully functional hospital. The MPS has four Acute care beds, an Emergency ward with capacity for about four patients from memory, no X-Ray facilities, no Operating Theatre and in recent months NO DOCTOR due to a contractual dispute between the General Practitioner Dr. Nebras Yahya and the Western Area Local Health District.

The increasing use of Telehealth facilities should not replace the use of face-to-face doctors. No matter how highly qualified a Telehealth practitioner is, he or she cannot reach through the screen to assist a patient in an emergency.

I dare to say that this present situation is untenable and that the residents of small communities in Country NSW deserve to be treated to the same standard as residents in the larger centres and Metropolitan areas.

I would therefore urge you to deliberate wisely and return a favourable outcome for Rural, Regional and Remote NSW residents.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission.