

**Submission
No 248**

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

Organisation: Edward River Council

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10 December 2020

NSW Government's Upper House Inquiry
Health Outcomes and Access to Health and Hospital
Services in Rural NSW

Dear Committee

Edward River Council is pleased to provide this response to the Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales to highlight the concerns of our community regarding the barriers they face in accessing equitable health and hospital services.

Edward River Council is in the Southern Riverina district of New South Wales, approximately 700km south west from Sydney and 300km north of Melbourne. The local government area comprises the major township of Deniliquin, six rural villages of Blighty, Boooroban, Conargo, Mayrung, Pretty Pine and Wanganella and 19 rural localities. It covers an area of 8,884 square kilometres and boasts large scale, productive agricultural land and beautiful natural assets. According to the ABS, the current Edward River population is 9,084 (ABS ERP 2019).

Edward River Council has an active Advocacy Strategy, which prioritises securing better health outcomes for the Edward River community.

The Deniliquin Hospital is a 28 bed, level three hospital providing acute and community health-care to the 8700 Deniliquin residents, and a broader catchment area of around 17,000 people in the Edward River and the wider Riverina regions including: Blighty, Boooroban, Conargo, Mayrung, Pretty Pine, Wanganella, Balranald, Barham, Bunaloo, Caldwell, Finley, Hay, Jerilderie, Mathoura and Moulamein. It provides emergency medical, surgical, obstetric, renal dialysis and high dependency care.

However, over 1500 local patients from the immediate Edward River Region requiring paediatric, oncology, immunology and other services must overwhelmingly travel to Victoria (Shepparton, Bendigo, Echuca and Melbourne), Albury or Wagga Wagga to seek health care. It must be noted that adequate data does not exist, or is not available, to account for the number of Edward River residents that must access medical services in Victoria.

The recent cross border closures and lack of access to Victorian medical services highlighted how critical this situation has become for residents. These services are located significant distances from Deniliquin and often require a round trip for very ill people, in emergency and time-critical circumstances these distances can lead to adverse health outcomes and possibly life-threatening situations. In addition, there is no adequate public transport system available that enables same day, return travel to the following hospitals:

• Echuca VIC	79 km	56 minutes
• Shepparton VIC	137 km	1 hour 33 minutes
• Bendigo VIC	168 km	2 hours 2 minutes
• Albury NSW	204 km	2 hours 19 minutes
• Wagga Wagga NSW	253 km	2 hours 46 minutes
• Melbourne VIC	301 km	3 hours 25 minutes

Council is therefore seeking immediate investment and support for Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) to develop a clinical services plan for the Deniliquin Health Cluster to rapidly provide access to these health services in Deniliquin. As part of this plan, Council requests the planning

systems and projections that are used by NSW health to determine the provision of health services are made available to meet the needs of residents living in the Edward River region and catchment area.

It is critical to note that children under 16 years of age cannot be treated at Deniliquin Hospital and are typically transported by ambulance or by parents to Victoria to Echuca, Shepparton or Bendigo.

Statistics provided by the educational services located in Deniliquin (five schools, five preschool and early learning centres and one family day care service) showed that in 2018, 2063 children aged under 15 years required treatment at the Deniliquin Hospital (2018). These statistics do not include the broader Edward River region, nor the broader Riverina catchment as stated above. The statistics also do not include illnesses, incidents or accidents that occurred in the home.

Edward River Council strongly advocates that basic paediatric care and treatment can and should be administered in Deniliquin.

With the State Government having committed funding to significantly improving hospitals in other Riverina Murray areas including Culcairn (\$20M to \$30M – population 1120) Griffith (\$36M), Tumut (\$55M population 6000) and Wagga Wagga (\$256M) - upgrades to services at the Deniliquin Hospital must be prioritised - given its location at the centre of the Southern Riverina and the size of its catchment area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That local General Practitioners can administer primary and emergency pediatric care at Deniliquin Hospital
2. Prioritise funding and the provision health professionals to ensure paediatric, oncology, immunology and other common health issues can be treated in Deniliquin
3. Out of town (Victorian) medical visits must be accounted for. Data is required to ascertain the number of residents that are forced to see doctors or receive treatment in other centres such as Echuca, Bendigo, Shepparton or Melbourne.
4. The funding commitment from the NSW State Government of \$3.2 million for upgrades to Deniliquin Hospital be expediated with a start date confirmed.
5. That overseas medical graduates be allowed to work in regional areas. There is a public misconception of the hurdles faced by GP's wanting to relocate – Australian graduates can do so anywhere they please in Australia however overseas graduates cannot. Typically, they are seconded to an area from between five and 10 years.
6. The immediate reinstatement of the Rural Other Medical Practitioners (ROMPs) Program for eligible rural, remote and regional areas.

Cr Norm Brennan
MAYOR

Philip Stone
GENERAL MANAGER