

**Submission
No 252**

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

Organisation: Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce

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As a community group, the Chamber of Commerce has heard many disturbing accounts of poor access to healthcare in Wee Waa & the surrounding district.

Wee Waa has a population of around 1600 (although this is rapidly declining due to deficiencies in the availability of health care) and the town also services extensive outlying areas. We have one GP and he does not normally visit the local hospital. He is only available for in-person appointments 4 days a week, usually 2-3 weeks each month - a situation we believe no city resident would feel comfortable with. It is widely agreed that this town needs at least 2 more full-time doctors. Residents are often forced to travel a further 42 km to Narrabri for healthcare, with some already having travelled 80km just to get to Wee Waa.

The services our hospital offers have declined markedly in recent years. It is now heavily reliant on the STAH system which is grossly inadequate in most situations. The strain is evident on our local nurses, some of whom have left the profession as a result.

Just some examples of poor outcomes resulting from limited access to health services in Wee Waa include;-

1. A woman who died at home alone because she didn't want to go to hospital as she knew there was no doctor there. She had specifically stated in a care plan that she wanted to die in hospital.
2. A terminally ill resident who, after being treated in Tamworth hospital, was unable to return to Wee Waa due to the absence of a VMO, despite his wishes. He died in Tamworth & his family were burdened with the additional expense of bringing his body back to Wee Waa.
3. A teenager with a severe laceration having to drive himself from Wee Waa to Narrabri as he was unable to be treated at Wee Waa hospital.

Many residents, particularly the elderly, have lost faith in the provision of local healthcare & live their lives in fear of not being able to receive the necessary healthcare in their time of need.

We are sure there are many instances of people who have either delayed or decided not to bother seeking medical treatment due to the difficulties in accessing it locally. This is obviously going to result in poorer health outcomes.

To not properly treat patients locally in the regions means one of two things occurs; (a) they must travel/be transported to another location, meaning added cost & stress, & a transfer of the cost of treatment to another cost centre within the Department, &/or (b) they are not treated adequately or at all, resulting in poor health outcomes including death. It simply does not make any moral or economic sense to under-resource healthcare in regional communities.

Wee Waa's poor access to healthcare also has negative economic implications for our town. We are aware of many residents who have already left town purely due to the inadequate access to healthcare, and of many others who are seriously considering doing the same.

There would be many potential residents who "swiped left" at Wee Waa when looking for a possible new home, due to its current deficiencies in availability of healthcare. Additionally,

residents needing to travel out of town for healthcare are less likely to spend money in town, continuing the downward spiral of our small community, like many other small communities in regional NSW.

This current situation, which has gone on for years, is literally killing our town. It is simply not good enough.