

Submission
No 259

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

Organisation: Australian College of Nurse Practitioners

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Australian College of Nurse Practitioners response to:

Parliament of New South Wales

**Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural,
regional and remote New South Wales**

15th December 2020

Hon. Greg Donnelly MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health
Legislative Council
Parliament of New South Wales

By email: portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Hon. Greg Donnelly MLC,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales.

The Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) is the national peak organisation for Nurse Practitioners, advancing nursing practice and consumer access to health care. We actively seek opportunities to contribute to improvements to safety, quality and access to health care.

This submission highlights key issues to be considered moving forward for improving health outcomes and services in rural, regional, and remote New South Wales.

Nurse Practitioners have much to offer in the context of improving health care access, health outcomes, and consumer satisfaction within rural health services in NSW.

Research globally validates Nurse Practitioners, regardless of practice context or specialty, as providing high quality, cost-effective health care. Nurse Practitioners work under extended scopes of practice outlining their roles and responsibilities. In rural regions in Australia, Nurse Practitioners primarily working in primary health care settings. They care for patients with chronic diseases, managing their symptoms, aiming to avoid complications of disease, thus keeping people in their home towns longer and avoiding travel to higher care provision hospitals. The availability of local health care support via Nurse practitioners also promotes early discharge from hospital and the prevention of complications.

Often many rural and remote communities in NSW don't have access to a primary GP service. The Nurse Practitioner provides a vital role in providing health care and navigating the health system, including telehealth, and overcoming low health literacy within the community. Chronic illnesses have become more complex and challenging to manage putting an increasing demand for services in rural regions. Nurse Practitioners can improve access to health care by forming strong relationships within the community and local and wider health care professions.

Implementation of Nurse Practitioner roles within NSW would be strongly supported by the ACNP. Nurse Practitioner models of care (including rural) in Australia have been shown to improve access to care, and provide for equity of care, for emergency department patients where people would otherwise experience long waiting times, excessive times for management of conditions, and delays in diagnosis, treatment and discharge. Recent studies in Newcastle have shown Nurse Practitioners working in residential aged care facilities reduce ambulance transfers to hospital and reduce admissions to acute services.

Similarly Nurse Practitioners working in Oncology are seen as a potential solution to meet increasing demands for cancer care as active research is expanding treatment options and improving cancer survivorship. Nurse Practitioners in Palliative Care in the outpatient and community setting are also a logical direction. They provide care outside hospitals with fewer hospital admissions and lower costs as patients choices are a priority with patients preferring to be at home as they approach death and being pain free doubled in importance.

Implementation of Nurse Practitioners roles in rural, regional remote NSW has been challenging due to the limited progress to date overcoming the well documented barriers. These include;

1) Limited planning for skilled workforce maintenance and retention;

There is an urgent need to develop nurse practitioners to strengthen and maintain a skilled rural health workforce. There is no current plan in NSW to create innovative new Nurse Practitioner roles to optimise workforce capacity and meet current and future health care needs. Strong leadership and knowledge of Nurse Practitioner capabilities is required by executive leaders and primary health networks to deliver services, reducing gaps in services. An important part of this requires engagement with key stakeholders to overcome local barriers and to invest in and sustain a talented nursing workforce.

2) Access to Education and Training

There is no current plan in NSW for financial cooperation from community and acute health care providers to overcome restrictions such as geographic distance to educate and train nurses towards endorsement as a Nurse Practitioner. This has resulted in a reduction of innovative models of care within healthcare and lack of understanding of the value of Nurse Practitioners.

3) MBS inequity for Privately practicing Nurse Practitioners

Patients do not have equivalent subsidies for healthcare if they chose an NP as their provider, creating financial disadvantage through increased out-of-pocket expenditure for professional attendances, diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, and diagnostic imaging. Restrictions such as the collaborative arrangements confuse imaging providers, which has resulted in documented breaches of patient privacy

4) PBS reform,

NSW has not signed up for PBS reform. Consequently, public employed Nurse Practitioners cannot provide PBS prescriptions and CTG prescriptions, providing an inequity for patients. Other restrictions on PBS by Nurse Practitioners may require some patients to seek alternative care providers outside their preferred care team, resulting in decreased patient choice , or alternately, increased costs of medicines.

5) Certification

Nurse Practitioners can independently assess, diagnose, and treat illness and injury but cannot certify Centrelink, Worksafe, and Comcare certificates/documents, and Driver's License Medicals. Additionally, although a Nurse practitioner may be the only health professional in a rural are, they cannot certify death.

ACNP supports innovative Nurse Practitioner roles in NSW to improve access, efficiency and quality of care for patients reducing the inequity for people living in rural communities. Rural populations have shorter life expectancies, increased risk factors and higher rates of chronic disease and this contributes to significantly poorer health outcomes.

Economically, Nurse Practitioners are also very cost effective, this is supported by the KPMG Cost benefit Analysis commissioned by the Federal Government. A copy of this can be found on our website https://www.acnp.org.au/client_images/2186335.pdf

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this important review. I would be happy to discuss our responses further, and we look forward to participating in the consultation.

Yours sincerely

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