

**Submission
No 397**

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

Organisation: Warren Shire Council

Date Received: 13 January 2021

Office of the Mayor

The Hon. Greg Donnelly MLC
Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health

13th January 2021

Dear Sir,

Re: Inquiry into Health Outcomes and Access to Health and Hospital Services in Rural, Regional and Remote New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our thoughts and recommendations to your inquiry into Health Outcomes and Access to Health and Hospital Services in Rural, Regional and Remote New South Wales in particular the provision of medical health services in the Warren Shire.

Warren Shire Council covers an area of 10760 square kilometres and has a population of 2732 of which people 65 years old and over make up 20.8% of the population and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population account for 17.7% of the population.

The shape of the 10760 square kilometres is irregular and is longer in the north south direction than in the east west direction. This means that residents in the south eastern corner of the Shire reside 120 km from the regional centre of Dubbo, and, the residents in the north western part of the Shire must travel 300 kms to Dubbo.

Medical service provided in the Shire is limited at best with hospitalisation, specialist and most allied health services, provided in Dubbo as the closest regional centre, and beyond.

Warren Shire Council supports and has facilitated improved medical services for its community by providing a purpose built medical centre at a site separate to our Multi Purpose Health Service (MPHS). Council additionally provides a residential unit for a medical doctor in Warren, at a subsidised rental.

In consideration of the Warren Shire Council's submission, the following recommendations are provided for your consideration with the background to the recommendations within the body of the submission.

Recommendation 1: Full support to attract Doctors and their families to become permanent residents of Warren and full support for Visiting Medical Officers to our hospital.

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Recommendation 2: That the Warren Shire community should be able to access services that are currently not adequate or non-existent.

E.g. Dementia Specific Unit, Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health, Speech therapy, Oncology/Chemo, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapy services, Diabetes education and services, Dietician, Palliative Care, Paediatric Services, X-Ray and Ultrasound Services (Medical Imaging), Renal Health Service, Maternity Services, Rehabilitation including Cardiac Physiotherapy and Allied Health Services, Recuperation from illness (surgical and medical) services, Lung (Respiratory) Rehabilitation Services, Palliative Service.

Recommendation 3: Increase in visiting allied and specialist health services in Warren.

Recommendation 4: The medical services provided to the Warren community requires:

- a) An increase in Home Care Packages and more staff training;
- b) Better training - Ability to grow our own – Upskilling Hostel workers by providing them with education and training (funded) in Aged Care Certificate. Some of these staff have completed Enrolled Nurse Certificate. Similarly, EEN completing RN Degree while working full time or part time. Need to provide more support for staff wanting to improve their professional development – e.g. study leave or other enticements;
- c) Quality staff accommodation; and
- d) An increase of resources for Community Nursing.

Recommendation 5: That nurses are trained to deliver Chemotherapy treatments within the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service.

Recommendation 6:

- a) That a Dementia Specific Unit be established at the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service; and
- b) That minor modifications of Calara House to support a Dementia Specific Unit is not an option and would only lead to a down grading of the current facility.

Recommendation 7: That real action needs to be taken on survey results in which the community has participated. That increased use be made of Council's purpose built medical centre by medical and allied health professionals. That the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service becomes, as its name suggests, becomes a much more broad ranging provider of quality health care services. That Warren be seen as a sub-regional hub in the provision of health care. In regard to this, the recent significant upgrades to the Warren Airport allow for the positioning of Warren as an aero medical retrieval point.

Warren Shire Council would welcome an invitation to present their submission to the enquiry should an opportunity allow this to occur. In addition, should you require clarification or additional information on any part of our submission, please do not hesitate to contact Council's Mayor, Councillor Milton Quigley

Yours faithfully,

Milton Quigley
Mayor

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Submission to the Inquiry into Health Outcomes and Access to Health and Hospital Services in Rural, Regional and Remote New South Wales

Warren has a wonderful medical facility which was built by Warren Shire Council to provide medical and allied health services. This complements our Multi Purpose Health Service. The facility was built to allow residents access to a broader range of medical services. The current situation in Warren Shire is that we simply do not have enough permanent/full time General Practitioners and we are finding it hard to attract doctors who will live in Warren. This has created the situation where residents cannot get an appointment at the medical centre and they may not see a doctor at the hospital. At present, Warren does not have a Doctor on duty most weekends. The Shire has many young families and if we do not have adequate health services, we will lose this valuable asset and we will find it very hard to attract people into our community.

Recommendation 1: Full support to attract Doctors and their families to become permanent residents of Warren and full support for Visiting Medical Officers to our hospital.

Warren Shire Council expects the same level of health services at our local Multi Purpose Health Service and Warren Family Health Centre as our metropolitan counterparts can access. With a reduced or a lack of outreach specialist services to Warren, it has become harder for residents living in the Warren Shire to access specialist services in a timely manner. Our community believes that if we created a small regional hub to service the surrounding areas it would support the services that we are recommending in this submission.

Recommendation 2: That the Warren Shire community should be able to access services that are currently not adequate or non-existent.

E.g. Dementia Specific Unit, Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health, Speech therapy, Oncology/Chemo, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapy services, Diabetes education and services, Dietician, Palliative Care, Paediatric Services, X-Ray and Ultrasound Services (Medical Imaging), Renal Health Service, Maternity Services, Rehabilitation including Cardiac Physiotherapy and Allied Health Services, Recuperation from illness (surgical and medical) services, Lung (Respiratory) Rehabilitation Services, Palliative Service.

Warren Shire has a high percentage of an ageing, low socio economic and indigenous population who can have a range of complex health issues. Some members of our community can be socially and financially disadvantaged when they have to access health services outside our Shire and have to travel a minimum of 130kms and up to 300kms. Access to face to face health services would be far more beneficial for good health outcomes than travelling outside our area and the current trend towards Telehealth is not always suitable for some members of our community.

Recommendation 3: Increase in visiting allied and specialist health services in Warren.

Hospital staffing is an ongoing issue in Warren, and it is often left to other agencies to fill in the gaps of care. In the case of Home Care services provided locally, care workers are very rarely trained nurses but are expected to assist the client with dressings etc. after showering. Clients are usually referred again to the hospital staff if the care workers notice issues that concern them. As we have an ageing population and the elderly wish to stay in their own home as long as possible, adequate resources for Community Nursing need to be ongoing. To attract nursing staff to town permanently, quality accommodation is needed on site.

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Recommendation 4: The medical services provided to the Warren community requires:

- a) An increase in Home Care Packages and more staff training;***
- b) Better training - Ability to grow our own – Upskilling Hostel workers by providing them with education and training (funded) in Aged Care Certificate. Some of these staff have completed Enrolled Nurse Certificate. Similarly, EEN completing RN Degree while working full time or part time. Need to provide more support for staff wanting to improve their professional development – e.g. study leave or other enticements;***
- c) Quality staff accommodation; and***
- d) An increase of resources for Community Nursing.***

Residents who require oncology treatment have to travel to Dubbo (130kms one way), Orange (250kms one way) or even Sydney (500kms one way). This is not a good health outcome for these patients for several reasons. The financial burden whilst already coping with their diagnosis, experiencing difficulties being away from home, family and friends and they may experience reactions to their treatment whilst travelling home.

Recommendation 5: That nurses are trained to deliver Chemotherapy treatments within the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service.

Warren Shire Council and Warren Rotary Club with the support from the community have advocated for some time to establish a Dementia Specific Unit. This will alleviate the tyranny of distance and stress that family members have to face when travelling to see their loved ones.

Recommendation 6:

- a) That a Dementia Specific Unit be established at the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service;***
- b) That minor modifications of Calara House to support a Dementia Specific Unit is not an option and would only lead to a down grading of the current facility.***

There have been many surveys completed over the past few years with the results indicating the urgent need for additional funding to allow for an increase in specialists and allied health visiting more regularly in rural, regional and remote areas of NSW. However, issues raised in those surveys are still the same and no additional support has been provided or if one area has been increased then it is usually at the expense of another area.

Recommendation 7: That real action needs to be taken on survey results in which the community has participated. That increased use be made of Council's purpose built medical centre by medical and allied health professionals. That the Warren Multi Purpose Health Service becomes, as its name suggests, becomes a much more broad ranging provider of quality health care services. That Warren be seen as a sub-regional hub in the provision of health care. In regard to this, the recent significant upgrades to the Warren Airport allow for the positioning of Warren as an aero medical retrieval point.