

**Submission  
No 399**

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

**Organisation:** Western Parkland Councils

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# Western Parkland Councils

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The Director – Portfolio Committee 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

## Western Parkland Councils Submission

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

The Western Parkland Councils welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote NSW.

#### **Introduction**

The Western Parkland Councils represent the eight Councils who have partnered with the Australian and NSW Governments to deliver the Western Sydney City Deal: Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly. The Councils are committed to working collaboratively to achieve long-term outcomes for this growing region.

Under the Western Sydney City Deal, the Councils have joined with two Local Health Districts, two Primary Health Networks and the non-government sector to form the Western Sydney Health Alliance. The Alliance was established to improve coordination and effectiveness of health services in the region and support healthier neighbourhoods.

The Western Parkland Councils are providing a local government response to this inquiry, whilst acknowledging the individual submissions that have been made by Councils.

This submission is advocating for the Committee to consider:

- The Western Parkland City includes significant rural areas where communities can experience challenges accessing health and other services similar to other rural areas in New South Wales;
- Effective strategies for improving health outcomes in rural, regional and remote New South Wales may also offer benefits to achieving better health outcomes in the peri-urban areas of Greater Sydney;
- Enhancing health facilities and services in the Western Parkland City could support better access to services for adjoining rural communities in the Illawarra, Central NSW, Hunter Valley and Central Coast regions.



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## Rural Communities of the Western Parkland City

The Western Parkland City is a diverse region where large tracts of bushland, scenic hills, floodplains, rivers and waterways weave through urban neighbourhoods, farmland, rural towns and villages. The local government areas of Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly in particular include substantial rural lands and dispersed settlements (see regional map attached).

The residents of the Western Parkland City's rural areas can experience challenges accessing health and other services similar to those experienced in other rural areas of New South Wales. The scale of the region results in significant travel distances and times as residents seek to access health services in the metropolitan centres of Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith. Inadequate public transport infrastructure, particularly for intra-regional travel, increases the difficulty with accessing health facilities within the region and further impedes residents' access to a full range of health care and services.

Inadequate scale and range of health services and insufficient workforce supply compounds these physical access issues for the rural areas of the Western Parkland City. The Wollondilly local government area (LGA), for example, has a current population of more than 50,000 people (and expected to grow to nearly 90,000 residents by 2036) through 19 towns and villages spread over an area of 2,557 square kilometres. There is currently no public or private hospital nor acute care centre in this Shire which also has one of the lowest ratios of General Practitioner to resident population in NSW (1:2750 in 2018).

The Distribution Priority Area system which classifies significant parts of the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly local government areas as ineligible for General Practice incentive Medicare schemes (i.e. international medical graduates/medical practitioners being able to access Medicare) is a serious impediment to the attraction and retention of General Practitioners.

Like other parts of the Western Parkland City, its rural areas are characterised by quite different demographic profiles and health services need to be tailored to meet local community needs if equitable health outcomes are to be achieved. For example, in contrast to the relatively young, growing population of Wollondilly, the Hawkesbury LGA has a much higher proportion of residents who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (more than double Greater Sydney) and the Blue Mountains has an older, aging population and higher needs in the areas of diabetes, mental health, physical therapy, and preventative health programs. The inadequacy of existing health facilities and services to meet the needs of local communities is covered in more detail in individual Council submissions to this Inquiry.

## Broader Application of Innovative Service Delivery Models

In addition to seeking increased health facilities and services for this region's rural areas, the Western Parkland Councils would like to highlight that effective strategies for improving health outcomes in other rural, regional and remote areas of New South Wales may also offer benefits to achieving better health outcomes in the peri-urban areas of Greater Sydney.



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For example, innovative service delivery models such as tele-health, Integrated Health Neighbourhoods and mobile health specialist services may be equally effective in addressing the health needs of this region's rural communities as they are in more remote parts of New South Wales.

In particular, Commonwealth and NSW Government initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that have improved health outcomes for rural communities should be maintained. A significant investment in virtual and integrated health care, to complement local and regional health services and facilities, will enable regional and rural Australians to more easily access needed primary care and specialist medical health services.

Our Councils encourage the research and development of new approaches to achieving better health outcomes that can inform evidence based decision making in health planning. The Councils are keen, for example, to support pilot programs that test the replicability and scalability of innovative rural health programs and service delivery models that may deliver better health outcomes for rural communities in the Western Parkland City. This needs to be established through an evidence based approach resulting in the equitable distribution of health outcomes and the development of appropriate benchmarks for services.

## **Enhancing Health Facilities in Peri-Urban Areas to Improve Access for Regional Communities**

Enhancing health facilities and services in the Western Parkland City could improve health outcomes for these growing populations as well as supporting better access to services for adjoining rural communities in the Illawarra, Central NSW, Hunter Valley and Central Coast regions.

Reinvestment and renewal of aging facilities at Blue Mountains District ANZAC Memorial Hospital at Katoomba and the strategic health precincts at Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith may reduce the need for expensive and lengthy patient transfers and provide more accessible services for residents in these adjoining rural areas than further centralising facilities in the eastern parts of Greater Sydney. Individual Council submissions further address the issue of transport and connectivity and the impact this has on a person's access to health care.

We thank you for your consideration and welcome any further opportunity to work collaboratively with the NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee 2.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Coleman  
Executive Officer  
Western Parkland Councils



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