

**Submission  
No 435**

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

**Name:** Cr Ben Shields  
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DUBBO REGIONAL COUNCIL  
Office of the Mayor  
Councillor Ben Shields

12 January 2021

Mr Greg Donnelly MLC  
Chair  
Inquiry into Health Outcomes and Services in Rural, Regional and Remote NSW  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Upper House inquiry into health outcomes and services in rural, regional and remote NSW. There is no issue more important to the residents of cities and towns in inland NSW that access to healthcare and that access appears to in decline judging by the experiences in the Dubbo LGA, particularly the in town of Wellington.

Wellington currently finds itself in a situation where there is just one doctor at Wellington Hospital. This extreme shortage of medical practitioners means the doctor is effectively on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and if they are unavailable, patients are forced to travel to Dubbo or Orange for their health needs.

Given there is also a shortage of general practitioners within the town, it makes access to even basic medical attention extremely difficult for residents. This is without even beginning to analyse the lack of specialist practitioners who visit the town or the state of the medical facilities.

The Western NSW Local Health District and Member for Dubbo Dugald Saunders have both gone on record acknowledging the situation but cite difficulties in attracting doctors to the regional area as the issue, while failing to suggest any potential solution. It is not acceptable to produce excuses without coming up with solutions. Attracting doctors to rural, regional and remote areas is not a new problem and it is not one that is going to go away.

It is an admirable goal for the NSW Government to have that people who live in rural, regional and remote areas to have access to similar levels of health and hospital services as metropolitan residents, and their health outcomes should be comparable. However the current circumstances in Wellington shows this is a long way from becoming reality.

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To bring attention to the issue I started a petition in Wellington, calling for the NSW Government to use any method necessary to bring new doctors to Wellington Hospital, increase services and provide Wellington residents with the healthcare they need. This petition was well received by the community and I will attach it to the submission as an appendix.


**I believe that the issues that are currently occurring in Wellington mean that a hearing should be held in the town**, to ensure that people are able to make a submission to the inquiry. The close proximity to Gulgong, which has also had significant problems with the provision of health services, would also allow people from there to participate in the inquiry more easily.

The issues Wellington face are covered by the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, particularly 1(b), 1(c), 1(d), 1(e), 1(g) and 1(k). I have no doubt the community would be willing to take part in a hearing to provide the inquiry with better insight into the shortcoming of healthcare in a regional NSW town.

I welcome this Inquiry and I hope that one of the outcomes is that the NSW Government places a greater emphasis on attracting and retaining doctors to smaller regional towns and more effort is placed on providing health services for all communities.

As always, I remain available for any Member of Parliament who may wish to discuss the social, economic and infrastructure issues that affect the Dubbo Region and Western NSW.

Yours faithfully 

 *Councillor Ben Shields*  
Mayor