

Submission
No 641

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 5 January 2021

Partially
Confidential

Re Private submission/letter of support to Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales.

Dear Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health Members,

and I are long term residents of Wentworth Shire (and township) and have watched, with some despair, the decline and departure of essential hospital, medical and allied health services, services that are accepted as fact of life elsewhere.

This is despite Wentworth Shire, population some 8000, being a major employer and exporter within our Australian and NSW economies.

As an elderly couple we do not have the resources to back an official submission with tested data but we are happy to paint a picture and bring several thoughts to the table.

In essence we look forward to a positive outcome from this long overdue inquiry.

This remote part of NSW is a region which surely, in 2021, deserves some benevolent and practical consideration.

Wentworth is the poor relation to nearby Mildura in Victoria but we have a strong community and a dedicated local committee determined to bring essential change in a medical sense.

While Wentworth has a crumbling hospital and virtually nothing in regard doctors, dentists or allied health providers, the town is expected to service a more than 25,000 square kilometre catchment extending half way to Broken Hill, plus unincorporated areas beyond Menindee and Pooncarie and above Wentworth Shire out to the South Australian border.

Tourism, pastoralism, broad acre farming, horticulture, aged care and a wide range of light industries are features of our almost self-sufficient local economy (obviously bar medical and allied health).

Wentworth Aerodrome is undergoing substantial upgrade to meet demand from increasing air traffic and is a logical and safe Royal Flying Doctor Service alternative to the busy Mildura Airport in this part of inland Australia.

In this memo we also bring to your attention additional elements to consider in this inquiry, elements which have emerged in past months.

The first element is media claims that due to regional population growth the Mildura Base Hospital is now less able to cope with future patient loads (obviously including former patients from Wentworth Shire).

In addition, the current coronavirus border closures between NSW and Victoria plus NSW and South Australia with associated uncertainty, are mooted to continue in one form or another.

Random border closures would, and already have had, a disastrous economic and social outcome for much of Far West NSW including the health of people residing in Wentworth, Broken Hill and many communities between and beyond.

Tourist traffic in Wentworth Shire is substantial and has potential, despite border lockdowns, to increase and place further burden on our stretched medical and allied health sector.

Our roads are rough and often dangerous, especially to the inexperienced.

Urban population growth in Wentworth Shire is increasing, particularly among the elderly.

In our pastoral and other agricultural sectors there are far less people spread over often huge areas. Their kids are doing correspondence, the husbands are out all day and sometimes days on end, the wives teach the kids, cook the meals and help outside when needed.

There are the usual mental health, loneliness, physical wear and tear issues that make it essential to have access to one-stop medical and allied health services when they do come to town for supplies.

These factors often lead to greater risk of accident and fatalities.

Health provision dollars that do flow into the region seem to get soaked up by temporary providers rather than being available to establish a cost effective long term self-sustaining service.

Our dream is to accommodate and give doctors and other health practitioners a challenging but rewarding career path while ensuring the continuity of services beyond short term funding.

There is great potential for tele-health but face-to-face with a regular doctor remains essential for these hard-working taxpayers and employers who often rarely come to town.

Wentworth certainly has wonderful community investment opportunity in building a small but cost effective hospital and providing built environment that encourages the provision of essential health services on a regular basis at quite low cost to taxpayers.

A final point is that Wentworth Shire is remote to Sydney and is historically more reliant on medical services out of Melbourne and Adelaide.

We are at the junction on Australia's two greatest rivers and one day, we will be a roadside stop on the 3600 kilometre trans-national highway between Perth, Parkes and Sydney.

Your Committee has a wonderful opportunity to be seen as visionary in how it deals with this life-critical topic at this interesting time in history.

Look forward.