

27 June 2024

Supplementary Question: The implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to the delivery of specific health services and specialist care in remote, rural, and regional NSW

1. The AMA stated that they are concerned about the lack of progress in progressing the recommendations in the PC2 report. What causes them most concern and do they have any suggested solutions?

In AMA (NSW) submission to the Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health, five critical areas of need have been identified as causing the most concern. These are; workforce, budget, training, industrial arrangements, and culture.

In regional areas, it is difficult to maintain organisational stability or foster growth due to an inability to recruit or retain doctors. The shortage of doctors in regional areas place inordinate strain on the existing workforce, leading to the implementation of unfair, onerous, and other unsafe rosters. This perpetuates a cycle of burnout and dissatisfaction among doctors, resulting in the departure of doctors working in these locations but also serving to deter others from seeking positions in regional locations.

The Minns health budget has not and will not meet the growing demands for health funding. Both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 State health budget have not met health inflation. In operational terms, this means services are running as normal but with an effective budget cut on what financially was required to run services the previous year.

Pathways for career progression are imperative, especially for doctors-in-training. These pathways may not be available in regional areas, which is a major disincentive. Additionally, regional hospitals tend to have fewer senior registrar positions, meaning DITs require additional support by consultants. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on locums in regional areas makes the provision of supervision for DITs more difficult.

Industrial arrangements of both visiting medical officers (VMOs) and staff specialists have been raised as areas of concern to AMA (NSW) throughout stakeholder engagement in preparation for AMA (NSW)'s submission to this Inquiry. VMOs in regional areas are eligible to claim a professional's support payment (PSP), which is an annual payment intended to recognise the impact of the more onerous nature of providing services in regional areas. The PSP was introduced in 2007 and has not been indexed since. Many VMOs have highlighted how they are either not advised of the entitlement or have issues claiming it. Staff specialists are entitled to claim TESL, for the purposes of training, education, and study. Similarly to the issue of PSP, staff specialists are having increasing issues with accessing TESL.

AMA (NSW) submission provides a more in-depth analysis of each area of concern for the Committee to review.

Doctors who serve remote, rural, and regional NSW communities are highly skilled individuals, who work long hours and are dedicated to their communities. The Minns Government must focus on measures that will make long-term real differences and commit to policies that support the recruitment and retention of the medical workforce, relieve budgetary pressures, provide more

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opportunities to train medical students and doctors in regional areas and foster a positive culture that support doctors to deliver medical services to local communities.