

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

13 December 2024

Ref: [REDACTED]

Dr Joe McGirr, MP
Chair
Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health Inquiry

Dear Dr McGirr

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL HEALTH REFORM AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION WITH REMOTE, RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES - Parkes Health & Wellness precinct and proposed new model of health care

Firstly, can I sincerely thank you for your considerable efforts to improve health services to regional and remote NSW. Thank you also for receiving our submission of 21 October 2024 and allowing us to present to the public hearing held on 13 December 2024.

In furtherance of the above, I reiterate (although know you are very well aware) the dire situation developing in the regions in relation to health services. Doctor availability appears to be at an all-time low and they exit the industry often overwhelmed and exhausted by the demand for their help.

As I suggested in the public hearing, there needs to be a new approach to primary health and developing the next generation of doctors. It is our sincere hope that our suggested approach is trailed and leads to a pipeline of new rural doctors (also nurses and allied health professionals) and a model which can be replicated elsewhere.

The circumstances at Parkes, which is not dissimilar to other regional areas, include,

1. The lack of access to doctors in the region is fast becoming critical.
2. Experienced fellowed doctors, cannot "work-harder" to solve this problem. They can however supervise and train multiple student doctors, which must be part of the long-term solution.
3. All tiers of government, industry and universities need to work together.
4. Parkes has a new \$80m state of the art hospital, with modern birthing suites, and twin operating theatres which are grossly underutilised.
5. There are no maternity services in Parkes since 2019.
6. Ambulance staff are caught up with patient transfer, emergency transfer of mothers in labour to other regions, critical vehicles in workshops for extended periods etc reducing their capacity to service local emergencies.
7. Charles Sturt University has a relationship with Parkes Hospital training young doctors. Including students from the Charles Sturt University Rural Medical School and two (2) JMO's from Royal North



Shore from the John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Program, who are all currently under a local doctors expert tutelage. This relationship needs to be fostered.

8. Aged care facilities have no visiting doctors.
9. Western NSW LHD and Parkes Council have developed a "Health Precinct" masterplan which provides significant opportunities for a health cluster around the new Parkes Hospital.
10. Local GP's are overwhelmed, fatigued and exiting the profession as a consequence. The opportunity therefore to act as a trainer and mentor, may well be appealing, providing contractual arrangements are desirable.
11. The way we are working, is not working, and new models must be trialled.
12. Health outcomes for the people in our region are in serious decline.

As a consequence of the current circumstances, and as I articulated at today's hearing, we believe there is an opportunity to trial a new way of simultaneously delivering primary health care to the community, service the needs of the Hospital and create a training pipeline for doctors.

Accordingly, our proposed demonstration project would involve:

- a. Establish an expert committee, including (for example) Western NSW Local Health District, Charles Sturt University, Doctor Practitioners, Nurse practitioners, then possibly senior State health bureaucrats and senior Commonwealth health bureaucrats (for example). This could be supported by the Local Member and Parkes Mayor to report back to government.
- b. Establish a start-up facility to trial the initiative, while the facility proper is developed/designed, including training facilities for the doctors and health professionals, the delivery of primary healthcare in colocation with training facilities, provide training of student doctors etc
- c. If the model is successful, develop facilities on the new Parkes health precinct to support the initiative, including the delivery of primary healthcare in a surgery close to the hospital, training of student doctors, training facilities for new doctors, inclusion of nurse practitioners, paramedics, accommodation, etc.
- d. The recruitment and direct employment of fellowed doctors to support this initiative.
- e. Develop and trial new models of care in consultation and oversight by expert committee. This may include nurse practitioners using virtual Health technology, student doctors oversighted by virtual Health technology, onsite doctors oversighting care, etc etc.
- f. There may be an expanded role for Ambulance officers in this new model, particularly to encourage the recruitment then to ensure the skill development/maintenance of IC and EC Paramedics.
- g. Use the expert committee and proposed project to fully support the relationship with Charles Sturt University (and other training providers) to train student doctors at Parkes.

As you well know the number of General Practitioners leaving the medical profession, well exceeds the number of new doctors entering the profession. It would seem this is the most fundamental issues that needs to be corrected to address the critical shortage of doctors in the regions.

Waits of up to 11 hours at the hospital emergency department by parents with sick children, people simply enduring sickness because appointments take many weeks, or driving hours to larger centres to see doctors are all too commonly reported.



To enable this demonstration project, we would see funding along the following lines.

Year 1 - \$2.5m to accelerate doctor recruitment. Establish and support the expert committee. Develop the new model of care and training. Undertake land acquisition and facility design, commence lead in infrastructure. Commence an off-site trial facility.

Year 2 & 3 - \$10m to build a multi-function training and health delivery facility based on expert panel oversight.

\$3m to build onsite accommodation for students, doctors and nurses.

We believe this would be a wonderful project to start addressing the health issues in Parkes and regional NSW.

I would welcome any further inquiry and extend a very warm and genuine invitation to visit Parkes and the Central West, so we can show you firsthand the health initiatives that are underway and could flourish with the appropriate support.

Yours faithfully



Cr Neil Westcott
Mayor