

**Submission
No 99**

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE No. 2
RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL HEALTH
REFORM AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION WITH REMOTE, RURAL AND
REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Name: Ms Marea Ruddy
Date Received: 15 November 2024

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To the Honourable Members of the Committee,

As a councillor and elected representative for Orange, I am submitting this on behalf of my community to stress the urgent need for accessible and clearly defined abortion services within our region. This submission highlights the current gaps in service, the impact of restricted access on our community, and practical solutions to improve access to reproductive healthcare for all residents of rural and regional NSW.

1. Significant Gap in Abortion Services Availability

The lack of readily available abortion services in Orange reflects a larger issue in regional NSW, where rural residents consistently face limited access to specialised healthcare. The decision to reverse recent restrictions on abortion services by NSW Health Minister Ryan Park was an important step, yet it left residents and healthcare providers without a clear implementation plan. This ambiguity places undue strain on individuals needing care, who often already face substantial geographic, financial, and logistical barriers to accessing abortion services.

While abortion is legally available, the lack of a local, well-resourced clinic or pathway to timely care makes this right largely inaccessible in practice. Women who need these services in Orange must either wait for a limited number of appointments at general practices or travel significant distances to urban centres, which is not a feasible or affordable option for many, particularly those in vulnerable situations

2. Importance of a Local Clinic and Clear Access Pathway

The establishment of a dedicated abortion clinic in Orange would address this gap and serve the community by providing comprehensive, localised care. Such a clinic would support not only abortion services but also essential pre- and post-care, reducing the emotional and financial stress caused by travel and long wait times. Furthermore, clear, publicly available information on the location, availability, and cost of services is essential to ensure that individuals in need are not left navigating a fragmented healthcare system without guidance.

3. Addressing Health Inequities Between Urban and Rural NSW

The current lack of abortion services exemplifies broader healthcare inequities between urban and rural NSW. Rural communities frequently experience poorer health outcomes due to under-resourced facilities, workforce shortages, and limited specialised care. Addressing reproductive healthcare in rural regions is critical to achieving health equity. Without accessible services, the right to abortion in rural areas like Orange remains symbolic, as geographic and financial barriers create de facto inaccessibility. A clear policy and dedicated infrastructure for reproductive services are imperative to deliver on the promise of equitable healthcare in NSW.

4. Recommendations for Action

To effectively meet the needs of the Orange community and similar rural areas, I urge the Committee to consider the following recommendations:

- **Establish a Local Abortion Clinic:** A dedicated clinic in Orange staffed with trained professionals and equipped with necessary resources would ensure comprehensive reproductive healthcare.
- **Define a Clear Policy Pathway for Abortion Services:** Outline a public, accessible policy detailing the abortion services available in rural NSW and the steps for residents to access these services.
- **Enhance Funding and Infrastructure:** Invest in rural reproductive healthcare infrastructure and incentivise the recruitment of specialists to support community needs.
- **Accountability and Regular Monitoring:** Implement oversight mechanisms to ensure that services meet community needs, including regular evaluations and adjustments based on feedback from healthcare providers and residents.

Conclusion

As a community leader, I am deeply committed to advocating for healthcare access that reflects the needs of the residents of Orange. Ensuring that all women in NSW have timely and equitable access to abortion services is not only a matter of health but of fairness and dignity. I urge the Committee to take meaningful action to bridge the healthcare gap in regional NSW and to support the establishment of a local, well-resourced abortion clinic in Orange. This would allow us to better serve our community and provide all residents with the comprehensive healthcare they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Councillor Marea Ruddy
Orange City Council