

Dr Joe McGirr
Committee Chair
Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

Friday 15th September 2023

Re: Response to Inquiry into the implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to workforce issues, workplace culture and funding considerations for remote, rural, and regional health.

Dear Dr Joe McGirr,

On behalf of Wagga Wagga City Council, I would like to thank you for inviting Council to make a submission to the inquiry into the implementation of recommendations relating to workforce issues, workplace culture and funding considerations for remote, rural, and regional health.

Council is basing our responses to the inquiry on our observations from a local government perspective in the Wagga Wagga area.

There are some positive steps being taken to address the recommendations relating to workforce issues, workplace culture and funding considerations for remote, rural, and regional health across the sector.

The Murrumbidgee Health and Knowledge Precinct (MHKP) is delivering some promising results and Council is an active member of both the MHKP Board and Alliance. The MHKP represents 21 LGAs in the Murrumbidgee region.

From our involvement in the MHKP we have observed a higher level of stakeholder collaboration occurring in our community focused on providing rural people with exceptional healthcare which is encouraging to see.

The MHKP is actively working to address workforce retention issues, through the "Education and Rural Workforce: Building a resilient workforce with local employment opportunities" with representation from various key stakeholder groups.

Recruitment of medical specialists to support our local workforce requirements continues to be a major challenge for our region. Council is an active member of the Riverina Medical Specialists Recruitment and Retention Committee which is focused on recruitment and retention of medical specialists in the Riverina. This committee has delivered much success over the years and represents a partnership of private and public hospitals, specialists, and Council.

As further evidence of recruitment challenges, Council has recently been approached by two private organisations regarding ongoing issues with recruitment and retention of medical specialists in our regional areas. 13 Cure After Hours Doctor Service wrote to Council regarding challenges with recruiting GPs to operate the out of hours GP service for Wagga Wagga and recently had to disband this. The other recent example is from another private medical company in Wagga Wagga who is also experiencing challenges in recruiting medical specialists and retaining them in a regional area.

Each different sector within the health sphere is tackling the recruitment issue from a different perspective, with some approaches based on a strong relationship model whilst others are using recruitment companies and marketing campaigns to try to address the shortage. I note Recommendation 11 refers to the development of a 10-Year Rural and Remote Medical and Health Workforce Recruitment and Retention Strategy and we look forward to seeing this develop further through collaboration of all key stakeholders. We also understand that the Murrumbidgee GP single employer model in being expanded after being developed in our region which is another positive initiative.

Other relevant items being addressed in the community which all contribute to the achievement of the recommendations include the current focus on housing in our community with the development of the Wagga Wagga Housing Strategy underway. Securing housing for new medical professionals can be challenging and is another barrier to recruitment and retention of the regional health workforce. Council has established an accommodation working group which includes participation from the NSW Government, the Murrumbidgee Local Health District, UNSW and private investors and developers on initiatives to address the shortfall of housing for our health workforce.

As part of the Council's initiated consultation regarding the development of the Wagga Wagga Airport Business Case it is clear that there is a strong reliance on air transport in our region for the health sector and there is clear support from stakeholders for an upgrade of the Wagga Wagga Airport to bring the airport up to modern standards to service the wider communities current and future needs.

The health sector relies on the Airport to access Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, with 6,000 regular passenger seats occupied by health professionals each year.

These health professionals, in particular medical specialists are attracted to working in our region because of our state of the art health facilities and our convenient and regular air services with Sydney. Similarly, for the same reasons, several Universities deliver health and medical degrees in Wagga.

These outcomes are facilitated by Council fairly charging for passenger use of Wagga Wagga Airport.

In terms of suggestions around how we can further support the implementation of the recommendations from the report we believe further funding to attract and support new medical specialists to our community and assist them to settle into the local community would be valuable. A suggestion recently was shared regarding providing further networking and professional development across the public and private providers through a collaborative and inclusive approach.



Further short-term funding to support the Murrumbidgee Health and Knowledge Precinct would enable the MHKP to become further established and continue with the valuable work that has commenced, while the MHKP works towards longer-term financial sustainability which is a current focus of the MHKP Board.

Please feel free to contact Christine Priest on priest.christine@wagga.nsw.gov.au or phone 0477458579.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Thompson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Peter Thompson
General Manager

