

September 27 2013

Dr Liz Develin
Director, Health System Planning and Investment
NSW Ministry of Health

By email: ruralhealth@doh.health.nsw.gov.au

RE: NSW RURAL HEALTH PLAN

Dear Dr Develin

The NSW Business Chamber (“the Chamber”) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission commenting on the NSW Rural Health Plan.

As you may be aware, the Chamber is one of Australia’s largest business support groups, with a direct membership of more than 14,000 businesses, providing services to over 30,000 businesses each year. Tracing its heritage back to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce established in 1825, the Chamber works with thousands of businesses ranging in size from owner operators to large corporations, and spanning all industry sectors from product-based manufacturers to service provider enterprises.

The Chamber is a leading business solutions provider and advocacy group with strengths in workplace management, work health and safety, industrial relations, human resources, international trade and business performance consulting.

Operating throughout a network of offices in metropolitan and regional NSW, the Chamber represents the needs of business at a local, regional, state and federal level, advocating on behalf of its members to create a better environment for industry.

With our membership spanning across NSW and with many member businesses operating in the health care and social assistance industries, this Plan is of utmost importance to regional and rural communities that are struggling to deliver quality hospital and health services.

Considering the provision of world class clinical services and infrastructure are two key priorities under the Government’s NSW 2021 state plan, the development and improvement of rural and regional health services should remain a high priority for the Government. Supporting the development of new health services in regional centres would assist in growing employment and making these centres better places to work and live.

The Chamber welcomes the improvements being made since the last rural health plan was released in 2002, particularly the increases in clinician numbers in medical and allied health professionals.

As you may be aware, the NSW Business Chamber launched the ‘10 Big Ideas to Grow NSW’ campaign to coincide with the 2010 state election with regionally-focused priorities that

NSW Business Chamber
incorporates

- Sydney Business Chamber
- Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships
- Australian Business Lawyers and Advisors
- Australian Business Consulting and Solution

NSW Business Chamber Limited
140 Arthur Street
North Sydney NSW 2060

ABN 63 000 014 504

Locked Bag 938
North Sydney NSW 2059

DX 10541 North Sydney

t 13 26 96

f 1300 655 277

e navigation@nswbusinesschamber.com.au

Regional Offices ACT, Mid North Coast, Western Sydney, Northern Rivers, Hunter, Murray/Riverina, Illawarra, Southern Sydney, Northern Sydney, Central Coast

identified key projects and services to help grow NSW regions, complementing ten core state-wide ideas. Several of the goals for regional NSW involved improving hospital and health centres, as well as creating regional centres for health, particularly in the Northern Rivers, Central West and the Murray-Riverina.

As you'd be aware, rural and regional areas face a critical shortage of trained health workers and are struggling to cope with an increasing demand, particularly with the burden of an ageing population.

The Central West is facing considerable health challenges in the future. With an ageing population in the area, this presents a unique set of challenges and demands on local health services, especially for chronic, complex and aged care services. Ensuring the area has an adequate health workforce is vital for its future and more needs to be done to encourage young students studying medicine and nursing to stay in the region, or return upon completion of their studies to fill this gap. Additionally, a concentrated program encouraging young skilled health professionals to the region via a range of relocation assistance strategies, particularly for their family members should be considered for the Central West.

In the Northern Rivers, the growing population is placing the area at risk of exacerbating current bed shortages and limited specialist support. More health services expansion is needed to ensure that hospitals in the area, especially Lismore Base Hospital, are self-sufficient.

The Murray-Riverina region deserves access to expanded quality hospital and health care services to ensure self-sufficiency. The Chamber recommends that equal consideration is given to both smaller towns and the regional hubs in the Murray-Riverina as the sheer distance between townships requires a multi-locational approach. The Chamber wrote to the NSW Health Minister in January 2012 to support the proposal to build a community owned and managed private hospital in Griffith, in addition to providing greater funding for improvements to the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. The Chamber welcomes the funding made available for the provision of these upgrades and new infrastructure.

With vast parts of the state including the lower South Coast, much of the Murray-Riverina, Grafton, the Upper Hunter, Tamworth and much of the New England area currently in a declared District of Workforce Shortage by the Federal Department of Health, there is still much progress to be made in ensuring that regional and rural areas meet the needs of the general population for health services. This shortage of general practitioners can result in delays of up to six weeks in these areas and can give rise to quality of life issues in attracting new, younger residents to the areas. E-health centres can bridge the gap by making GP services available via video link with skilled nursing staff to assist in person in non-emergency situations.

There are several NSW health initiatives that are extremely valuable from a business perspective, particularly the Healthy Workers Initiative. This program is focussed on improving health and reducing chronic disease in working adults in the manufacturing, construction or transport industries. With 17.5% of our membership comprising either manufacturing, construction or transport businesses, the Chamber would be keen to contribute to the success of this initiative and given the Chamber often collaborates with WorkCover NSW in the areas of workplace health and safety, we have expressed a willingness to assist in promotion of the Healthy Workers Initiative across our local chamber network contacts.

The Chamber welcomes the incoming Federal Government's commitment to improving the performance of public hospitals at the local level. The Chamber recommends the NSW Government

continue to collaborate with the Federal Government in delivering the best outcomes for health in rural and regional NSW communities.

The NSW Government must continue to deliver much needed hospital upgrades and new infrastructure as quickly as possible to the communities that are most in need, to ensure a high level of service delivery in the health and hospital sector. With the emerging challenges of an ageing population, NSW has to be at the forefront of health innovation and enabling a skilled workforce of health professionals to meet these demands.

Should you require more information on this matter, please contact Mr Craig Milton, Regional Affairs Adviser, on 9458 7913 or craig.milton@nswbc.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Orton". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul Orton
DIRECTOR, POLICY & ADVOCACY
NSW Business Chamber