

Mrs Maria Hitchcock
maria.hitchcock@gmail.com

Access to health care in the Hunter New England region

Dear Mrs Hitchcock

Thank you for writing on behalf of the Think Tank Team, New England Visions 2030 Institute, about access to health care in the Hunter New England region.

I acknowledge your concerns and appreciate your interest in this matter.

While GPs and primary healthcare are the responsibility of the Australian Government, NSW recognises it has a role in supporting primary care in rural areas. When the Australian Government is unable to ensure GP availability in local communities, the state supports primary healthcare providers to find solutions to medical workforce shortages.

Hunter New England Local Health District continues to work hard to recruit health professionals to regional and rural facilities. The NSW Government is committed to working with the Australian Government to explore opportunities for greater coordination and innovation. This includes supporting integrated health services and an adequate and stable clinical workforce for rural and regional communities.

The Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022-32 is specific to regional, rural and remote communities and will guide NSW Health's strategic focus for the next 10 years. The plan is a roadmap for the future provision of health services that understands and celebrates the diverse and unique nature of regional communities. Its vision is a sustainable, equitable and integrated health system delivering outcomes that matter most to patients and the community in regional, rural and remote NSW.

NSW Health has implemented a Rural Health Workforce Incentive Scheme to assist with the recruitment and retention of NSW health workers in rural and regional areas. It launched a program to deploy workforce to areas of need. It is expanding the Single Employer Model in NSW to rural, regional and remote local health districts through a collaborative, place-based approach, piloted in the Murrumbidgee Local Health District.

NSW Health will work with local health districts, primary care stakeholders, general practice, and rural generalist colleges and training agencies to implement the expanded model, and looks forward to working with the Australian Government on this vital reform.

Health staff accommodation is also an important factor for the recruitment and retention of health staff in regional areas. NSW Health has several health worker accommodation projects already completed, with others under construction or in the planning stages across regional NSW.

NSW Health is also working closely with local health districts and primary health networks across NSW, including in the Hunter New England region, to establish urgent care services. These services will deliver urgent care options to the community over extended hours, to reduce pressure on emergency departments.

Thank you again for writing. For more information, please contact Mr Brendon Cutmore, Director Information and Performance Support, Regional Health Division, NSW Ministry of Health, at brendon.cutmore@health.nsw.gov.au or on 0408 263 178.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Minns', with a stylized flourish at the end.

05 July 2023

Phil Minns
Deputy Secretary, People, Culture and Governance