

31 October 2024

Enquiries: Ms J Bennett: 0428 690 935

The NSW Select Committee on Remote, Rural and Regional Health Chair

Submission lodged via email

Dear Committee

Re: The third inquiry into the implementation of the recommendations of the inquiry into Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales

Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) speaks with a unified voice for its collective priorities. This region has a proud history of working collaboratively, representing over 180,000 people covering an area of more than 53,000sq kms comprising the local government areas of its membership - Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes and Weddin.

Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and prioritisation, CNSWJO has consulted with its stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities. The CNSWJO Strategic Plan can be found here - www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the third inquiry into the implementation of the recommendations of the inquiry into Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales.

This response is informed by policy developed in region.

In the first instance, congratulations for continuing to focus effort in this area, especially seeking to ensure that *implementation* is delivering the desired improvement for regional communities.

Community sentiment surveying in our region in 2023 showed that health services are a priority for the shared constituents of all levels of government, head and shoulders above any other priority at 93% where 64% was the next priority. Quite simply – our communities believe that the health system is still insufficient. This would indicate that any change as a result of implementation of the recommendations from the original inquiry are yet to be recognised by the people of this region.

CNSWJO has been working with the Rural Doctors Network and Charles Sturt University to try and unpack this extraordinary result from the regional survey and would welcome any support from the Committee that it can provide.

While there could be a variety of reasons for this sentiment, the issues with rural health are a result of government policy, rather than community/population characteristics. At the local level councils become the provider of last resort when the existing mechanisms fail.

The Central NSW JO speaks for over 180,000 people covering an area of more than 53,000sq kms comprising of Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, and Weddin.

Given that Councils are rate capped, the smaller the Council the greater the challenge, it is particularly galling that local government imperils its financial sustainability to support services that ought to be provided at the state and federal level.

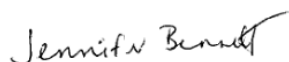
Governments need to start working together to meet their obligations to community and put community back at the centre of their activity. CNSWJO is of a view that structure needs to be put in place in region that enable this collaboration and that these should enable cross level of government jurisdiction.

Rural solutions should be designed for rural communities, rather than a retro-fit of solutions designed for urban communities. This is not just applicable to health and ought be a focus of the NSW Government in all areas from aged care to the visitor economy. Again, the structures need to be in place to effect this result. This will require a codesigned effort where community should be at the heart of the design.

In a nutshell, government needs to work to develop longitudinal, mutually beneficial, and genuinely collaborative relationships with community to design these solutions. These need to be developed in place and there is the potential to leverage the Joint Organisation network across regional NSW to support improved structural arrangements.

Representatives of CNSWJO would welcome the opportunity to work with you to achieve enduring change. If you require further information or clarification on comments in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0428690935.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Bennett
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Central NSW Joint Organisation