

NSW Rural Health Plan Issues

SUBMISSION

September 2013



CENTRAL NSW
COUNCILS



Centroc's Mission is to be recognised as the lead organisation advocating on agreed regional positions and priorities for Central NSW whilst providing a forum for facilitating regional co-operation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources; effectively nurturing sustainable investment and infrastructure development.

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Central NSW Councils (Centroc) comprises the Local Government Areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Boorowa, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Harden, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Upper Lachlan, Weddin, Wellington, Young and Central Tablelands Water.

It has two objectives, one around advocacy and the other around supporting members operations.

The Centroc Board is made up of the 34 Mayors, elected representatives and General Managers of its member Councils who determine priority for the region. These priorities are then progressed via sponsoring Councils. For more advice on Centroc programming and priorities, please go to our website at www.centroc.com.au/publications



Firstly, from feedback from our Executive Officer, Ms Jennifer Bennett attending the consultation in Dubbo I would like to congratulate you on delivering a well-run event.

It was also very pleasing to hear that Melinda Pavey, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health was in attendance.

In Central NSW the members of Centroc both individually and collectively have been active in delivering health services and supporting health workforce for some time, some would argue too long. Local Government is in this space at the direction of our communities and would be more than happy to hand over this role to other levels of government.

The Centroc Board has broad agreement with the issues as described in the *NSWS Rural Health Plan Issues Paper* where workforce is top of mind. This region sees workforce as including General Practitioners as well as those working in the State system and NGOs. Given the number of stakeholders, issues around workforce are complex including accommodation, ensuring that attraction strategies don't prejudice retention and providing flexible work options. Our members have individually and collectively been working and advocating in this space for a number of years. Current Centroc policy includes the need for growing workforce in the region where the current priority is full time doctor training akin to the model and James Cook University in Far North Queensland.

Central NSW Councils are in the throes of growing its capacity in supporting health workforce and promoting the region as an area of choice for health workforce. This is based on strategic work undertaken with key agencies in the region including those from State and Federal government including training institutions. The region would be keen to progress this work with key agencies where to date mining is the key contributor outside of Local Government.

In our view the culture of health services in this region needs to change from one of acceptance about working inside silos to one of embracing effective transformation looking for better health outcomes for our communities, whether this be with:

- engaging with local government on place based, solutions focussed activities in growing workforce and improving health outcomes which are incentivised to show broad stakeholder buy in;
- investigating innovative workforce attraction and retention schemes including for example spouse preference employment;
- recognising and managing community expectation rather than dismissing then managing community expectation;
- supporting and promoting e-Health records use including developing approaches that better match client need, for example centrally supported systems when required; and
- rationalising and making workable IT in the health system and using it where logical.

As was noted at the consultation, health should not be seen in isolation. Poor socio economic indicators, nutrition, employment, isolation, housing and other factors have serious implications for health. This is why the region is keen to see more place based activity where Local Government with its Community Service Planning would be a stakeholder of significance in any reform looking to minimise duplication and look for solutions to fit local circumstance.

NSW Health would be aware that despite the significant and welcomed expenditure in health and the overall improvement of health in this region, the Western Area Health District is improving at a slower rate than the whole of NSW. Further, growth in obesity and diabetes is faster in this region than for NSW.¹

Quite frankly local, State and Federal budgets cannot afford the duplication, culture of acceptance, poor communication and confusion that the feedback to the consultation in Dubbo showed still typify our health service delivery. At the same time there are pockets of excellence and a wealth of beloved health workforce.

Our Board recognises that delivering change is challenging, but are keen to work with the State Government, the Federal Government and the NGO sector on an appropriate level of support from Local Government. At every consultation we hear that things are getting better, the new model will deliver results, etc but still see a confusing and un-navigable sector in need of reform. It may be that the change is just over the horizon given the introduction of Medicare Local and the reforms to the region over the past few years from a State perspective. If this is true, a more holistic approach to health care is in train. If this is not the case then the system in this region needs change.

Our Board would welcome the opportunity work with the State on place based approaches to health care that have at their heart effective transformation of the culture of health delivery with improved health of our communities as the outcome.

Once again congratulations. For further advice in regards to this submission please contact the Centroc Executive Officer, Ms Jennifer Bennett on 0428 690 935.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Keith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Cr Ken Keith

Chair

Central NSW Councils (Centroc)

¹ Western NSW Health Needs Assessment 2013