



REGIONAL HEALTHCARE POLICY



WHAT WE BELIEVE

In 1996, people in regional NSW lived longer than those in Sydney. Now, rural people are dying on average five years earlier. Nevertheless, the NSW Government continues to strip medical services away from rural towns. More and more country people are travelling long distances for treatment or missing out on health care all together.



OUR ACTION PLAN

SFF recommends ten steps that must be taken to reverse this trend:

1. Develop a comprehensive incentive package to attract nurses and doctors to regional locations. Most rural areas struggle to attract qualified medical staff. Rural Doctors Settlement Package payments should be increased to the market rate. An annual training allowance can be provided to cover both course, travel and locum replacement costs. Housing can be provided where necessary.
2. Increase hospital staffing by adopting the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association recommendation to have one nurse for every four patients in medical and surgical wards; and one nurse for every three patients in emergency departments and children's wards across all regional hospitals.
3. Bring back local boards represented by clinical staff and community members in each public hospital to make decisions on hospital staffing and funding needs, and to lobby government directly. At present, regional boards are favouring larger population hubs and neglecting small town hospitals.
4. Establish a \$500 million independently administered grant fund for regional hospital equipment. Many regional communities are forced to conduct fundraising events and raffles to fund vital hospital equipment such as X-ray machines and CT scanners. The NSW Government should establish a grants program, in which each local board can apply for funding for new or upgraded equipment
5. Conduct an independent audit of regional public hospital services to determine what basic services are missing from each hospital. The results of this audit should be published on the NSW Health website, and the NSW Government should then develop a five-year plan and target to address these gaps. Multipurpose Service (MPS) sites should be gradually replaced



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by proper hospitals.

6. Develop a mental health service at every regional NSW hospital, by employing at least one permanent mental health practitioner in larger regional services and expanding outreach services in smaller hospitals.

7. Expand the NSW Government's Patient Transport Service, and roll it out to small towns. At present, the service is only available in big population centres, so small towns depend on ambulances.

8. Double travel and accommodation assistance for patients who need to travel more than 100km for medical treatment. At present, the NSW Government's Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme provides eligible recipients with just \$75 a night, which is insufficient. Both the travel and accommodation allowance should be doubled.

9. Stop all privatisation of public hospitals across NSW. The Liberal/Nationals privatisation of northern beaches hospital was a disaster. There were reports of cost cutting and equipment shortages. It's clear privatisation of health care does not benefit patients. If SFF holds the balance of power after the election, we will seek a guarantee from the government to cease all privatisation of public hospitals.

10. Conduct an inquiry into reports of bullying, harassment and misuse of funds by senior managers within NSW Health regional district officers. It would appear these problems are rife across regional NSW.