



Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance
Services
Minister for Women

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C-ECTF-23/10616

19 SEP 2023

Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliament
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter regarding petition numbers 3885-23 and 3939-23, tabled in Parliament on 22 August 2023 in relation to doctors in rural medical practices in Cardwell, Ingham, Tully and Mission Beach. As these petitions are similar in nature, I have taken the liberty of responding to both petitions in this letter. I therefore ask that this response be noted against each petition.

I appreciate the current difficulties in attracting and recruiting doctors to rural communities right across Australia. While primary health care, including general practice, is a Commonwealth responsibility, I understand the impact of local medical practices closing their doors due to lack of available medical practitioners, and the effect this has on the local community.

I understand that each rural community and its population needs are unique. Each requires a bespoke medical workforce model in order to provide appropriate health care services to minimise the need for residents to travel for health care. Townsville Hospital and Health Service (HHS) provides a comprehensive range of services, from primary care in remote locations along the western corridor of north Queensland from Charters Towers to just west of Richmond and along the eastern corridor from Home Hill to Cardwell in the north. The Townsville HHS is passionate about improving the health and lives of the north Queensland community and offers highly specialised care at Townsville University Hospital.

Additionally, the Cairns and Hinterland HHS provides excellent and sustainable healthcare for all in Far North Queensland, and services are provided as far as Tully in the south, Cow Bay in the north and Croydon in the west. The outer western region of the Cairns and Hinterland HHS includes extremely remote communities. Cairns Hospital is the only major referral hospital in Far North Queensland and also provides care for people from Cape York and the Torres Strait. Cairns and Hinterland HHS provides specialised health services, with a small number of high-level acute services done in Townsville and Brisbane.

Both the Townsville HHS and Cairns and Hinterland HHS are working closely with the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) to review and address long-term sustainability of access to primary care in local rural communities.

Townsville HHS is collaborating with the NQPHN and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council regarding the announced closure of the Cardwell Family Practice, to find a temporary solution to keep the practice running. To that end, the Townsville HHS has stepped in to ensure the Cardwell Family Practice remains open, with the assistance of Rural Health Management Services who have been engaged to operate the practice.

The Townsville HHS is also collaborating with the North Queensland Regional Training Hub to develop a pipeline for rural generalists to ensure a priority focus on training, recruitment, and retention of medical officers in rural communities. Similarly, the Cairns and Hinterland HHS is working closely with James Cook University to develop an integrated training pathway for rural generalists by increasing the number and variety of training opportunities within the health service and the wider far north Queensland region and is encouraging young doctors to pursue a career in rural general practice by partnering with the Royal Flying Doctor's Service to give early career doctors exposure to this area.

Our Government is committed to ensuring that Queenslanders can access the health services they need, when they need them, within their communities

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Fentiman', written in a cursive style.

Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women

Member for Waterford