

Letter of Transmittal

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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30 June 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration- Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker program

New England North West Health Ltd. (HealthWISE New England North West) is a 'for purpose' (not for profit), registered charity delivering primary care programs and clinical services across the New England North West area of NSW and the Darling Downs West Moreton region of QLD; across the following federal electorates: Blair, Flynn, Maranoa, New England, Parkes and Wide Bay.

HealthWISE is a major regional/rural provider of mental health, Aboriginal health and allied health (speech pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, podiatry, dietetics and exercise physiology, psychology) services. The majority of HealthWISE services are provided free of cost to the client made possible through funding from a range of government and non-government agencies, primarily, Primary Health Networks.

Recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce is vital to the delivery of primary health services in the bush and is a constant challenge for our organisation and others like us, operating in non-metropolitan areas of Australia.

We ask the inquiry to consider variations to the requirements of working holiday maker visas to make working in rural and regional Australia more attractive for skilled workers, and in turn, allow improved access to primary and preventative health services for all Australians.

HealthWISE made an earlier submission to your 2019 inquiry into Regional Migration and thank you for this additional opportunity to highlight potential community benefits of the Working Holiday Maker program.

Yours Sincerely,


Fiona Strang, CEO, HealthWISE New England North West

Response to the Terms of Reference:

The value of the program to Australia's economy, including tourism, health care and agricultural sectors

The extent to which the program can support economic recovery in regional Australia

Recommendation:

- 1. It is recommended that categories of work that can be undertaken by a working holiday maker to allow eligibility for a second or third year of working holidays, are expanded to include work completed in allied health in regional Australia.**

Current Working holiday (subclass 417) visa holders are eligible for a second or third visa if they complete three months (Second Working Holiday visa) or six months (Third Working Holiday visa) of specified work in specified regional areas.

The current approved industries for specific work include:

- *plant and animal cultivation*
- *fishing and pearling*
- *tree farming and felling*
- *mining*
- *construction*
- *bushfire recovery work in declared bushfire affected areas only, after 31 July 2019*

We ask the inquiry to consider widening the approved industries to include work in allied health, i.e. Dietetics, Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Psychology and Exercise Physiology.

We appreciate that agricultural, mining and construction industries require a seasonal workforce, however we believe that skilled clinicians and therapists would be a welcome addition to regional communities, even if candidates are not joining the area as permanent residents.

Skilled migrants have been an essential part of the speech pathology service at HealthWISE in recent years.

To fill a workforce gap in Narrabri, NSW (population 14,000) a Working Holiday Maker (Visa subclass 417) was employed on a short-term contract. This working holiday maker completed many appointments over this time under a 6 week program with several clients. This contract

was a success for clients, employer and the working holiday maker, but, the completed work did not satisfy requirements for a second or third working holiday visa.

As part of the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is proposed university fees for allied health courses are reduced. This proposal may increase the number of health professionals available to work in regional Australia, however the benefits of this policy will not result in an increase in the available workforce until education is completed in four to five years. Widening eligibility for extending working holidays for skilled individuals remaining in Australia could provide a benefit immediately.

Many HealthWISE service areas have been enduring the simultaneous effects of drought, bushfire and the COVID-19 pandemic. Delays in obtaining assistance for physical and mental health issues resulting from these events will have enduring implications for our communities.

Summary

HealthWISE thanks the Committee for their consideration of Working Holiday Makers in regional communities. Our organisation believes that consideration of our recommendations could lead to improved health services for all rural Australians and ultimately healthier communities, without impinging on employment prospects for the increased number of Australians who have recently been made unemployed.