

1915 Pinjarra Road,
Pinjarra WA 6208
PO Box 21 Pinjarra WA 6208

T: 08 9531 7777
mailbag@murray.wa.gov.au
www.murray.wa.gov.au



Ref: 3604-05
Enquiries: Dean Unsworth (08 9531 7703)

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into Provision of General Practitioner and Related Primary Health Services to Outer Metropolitan, Rural and Regional Australians.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into this very important issue.

The very significant issue that the town of Pinjarra, some 85km south of Perth is facing is one that is presented to the Committee, and specifically part (b) of the terms of reference:

b. current state and former Government reforms to outer metropolitan, rural and regional GP services and their current impact on GPs, including policies such as:

- ii. Distribution Priority Area and the Modified Monash Model (MMM) geographical classification system; and*
- iii. GP training reforms.*

The Shire of Murray is increasingly concerned at the looming drop in doctor numbers for our district.

The Shire is aware that there has been representation regarding these concerns made from the Pinjarra Doctors practice, and we as a community are increasingly worried that the zoning issue has yet to be resolved.

The Shire raises the ongoing issues related to medical staffing currently and progressively impacting Pinjarra Doctors. Specifically: -

- Since 15 January 2020, the practice now only has 3.5 Doctors down from 8 doctors less than 12 months ago, this has caused a loss of approximately 730 appointments per week. The workforce now comprises 2 Principal Doctors and 1.5 registrar.
- From 15 January 2022 a Registrar will join their team- The workforce will temporarily increase to 4.5 Doctors.
- The full-time Registrar completes his training in 2022 and becomes classed as 'unrestricted'. This Registrar travels from Joondalup, some 120 km away, and has made it clear he will be taking a position closer to his home.
- The current part-time Registrar completes her training at the end of this year, and will be leaving the Practice in mid-2022.
- Should Pinjarra Doctors practice not be allowed to take on new registrars in January 2022, come July 2022, they will not be able to source doctors in the town of Pinjarra as it is considered part of the Perth metropolitan area. This brings into question the ongoing sustainability of the practice and much needed medical services for Pinjarra.
- At this present moment the inability to accommodate patients has halved their income and puts into serious question the financial viability of the Practice.

The Shire of Murray believes that it is grossly unfair that Pinjarra, as a town of only 4,500 and 85 kms from the Perth CBD is zoned within the Perth metropolitan boundary. It has already been proven that this unfair boundary makes it impossible for Pinjarra to compete with Perth in obtaining doctors. This boundary excludes Pinjarra from sourcing overseas doctors. Unrestricted doctors are wanting to live and work close to our capital city and Mandurah, which have the infrastructure and amenities that a small town like Pinjarra cannot provide.

It also should be noted that a significant number of Pinjarra Doctors clients are from even smaller surrounding towns such as Waroona, Dwellingup, Coolup and Lake Clifton. A recent incentivisation scheme was announced, however this programme is only offered to much bigger population bases, such as Mandurah which has a population of 85,000.

General pathway registrars have not in the past 10 years applied to work in Pinjarra. Therefore, there is significant doubt they will do so now if Mandurah has the same incentives to offer them.

The Shire requests that the Committee considers this issue as part of its review. The Shire wishes for this issue be looked at on its own merit as it is a catchment for servicing the surrounding DPA communities that very clearly shouldn't be considered within the Perth catchment.

Peel Health Campus in Mandurah has recently been granted \$152 million to assist in the growing health service crisis within the Peel region. If the current zoning issue isn't resolved, this investment into the Campus will be less than optimum as there will be a significant spike in usage from the 10,000 active patients from Pinjarra Doctors.

The Shire of Murray has urgently requested the following be considered for Pinjarra, and thus feel that this submission adds significant value to the Committee's decision making to not only resolve this, but potentially other similar instances in the future. The Shire in particular, regarding this issue has requested that:

1. Pinjarra be rezoned to MMM2 and DPA status, which provides a short-term solution. Then, Doctors on a moratorium and GP registrars can train while working in Pinjarra and bridge the workforce shortage gap, and contribute to succession planning for the future of the health service provision in Pinjarra.
2. Consider the current incentives package be more targeted to Pinjarra as opposed to Mandurah which does not have the recruiting challenges that Pinjarra faces to recruit and retain doctors in Pinjarra.
3. Pinjarra be reclassified to a DPA which allows the recruitment of an OTD which provides for a long-term solution to the problem.

Thank you for the invitation to provide this submission.

Yours faithfully

Dean Unsworth
Chief Executive Officer