



16 March 2021

Mr Martin Foley
Minister for Health
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne 3000

Re: Amalgamation of Regional Health Services to the Detriment of Local Community

Dear Minister,

I bring to your attention the recently advertised proposals of Wimmera Health to amalgamate their health services with Ballarat Health Services. (See attached) This same proposal is earmarked for both Edenhope Health and Stawell Health.

The Health Workers Union has grave concerns with this proposal. Let us be frank. This is yet another cost cutting exercise from the Victorian Government into our public health system. I refer, of course, to the proposed roll out of your government's Private Sector Partnerships across other health services.

Ballarat Health Services are one of the worst employers in the public health system. They have a history of workplace bullying that led to senior management resignations within the organization. A recent survey conducted by the HWU to our public health members identified Ballarat Health Services as a hotspot, with approximately 75% of respondents answering yes to witnessing, experiencing or have been involved with a bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the workplace. Ballarat Health currently has an unresolved investigation into the bullying of staff in the finance department that led to the suicide of an employee.

Further, we understand the Victorian government has plans to roll out further contracting out of vital public services within Ballarat Health Services. It's only a matter of time before dodgy private contractors, like those awarded the task of managing Victoria's hotel quarantine system, are given the task of providing frontline services – like kitchen staff, patients services assistants, cleaners, personal carers, and security – at our regional hospitals. This is in direct contrast to the Government's recent initiatives to bring pathology services back into the public fold, after the department has realized what a disaster outsourcing of those services has been.

“Caring for our Caregivers”

Branch Secretary: Diana Asmar

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This proposed amalgamation of regional health services at Wimmera Health, Edenhope Health and Stawell Health will be to the long-term detriment of those local affected communities, and public health workers at those facilities. It is simple – outsourced employees are worse off than their public counterparts.

These hospitals are the heart and soul of their respective community. Job losses at regional hospitals have the capacity to devastate these small communities. Can you guarantee no job losses or loss of local health services?

There is also the issue of a shortage of transport from these areas to Ballarat and Melbourne for medical appointments already. What are your plans to remedy this should this proposal proceed?

It is regrettable that Treasury bureaucrats and politicians in Melbourne have no understanding of the impact of those decisions on those regional communities. This issue is solely about money and cost-cutting. Due to the Victorian Government's poor financial management and excessive borrowings, it is now forcing regional communities to pay for its excesses.

The HWU - on behalf of our members at Wimmera Health, Edenhope Health, and Stawell Health - opposes any such move to amalgamate these services with Ballarat Health, or any other provider. We formally ask you to cease this process immediately and review it.

Yours sincerely,

Diana Asmar
Secretary, Health Workers Union

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