



## **NSW Parliamentary Inquiry:**

# **Current and future provision of health services in the South-West Sydney Growth Region**

*By Amy Lawton, Social Research and Information Officer, WESTIR Limited*

*July 2020*



Photo by Amy Lawton

© WESTIR Limited A.B.N 65 003 487 965 A.C.N. 003 487 965

This work is Copyright. Apart from use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part can be reproduced by any process without the written permission from the Executive Officer of WESTIR Ltd.

All possible care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this publication. However, WESTIR Ltd expressly disclaims any liability for the accuracy and sufficiency of the information and under no circumstances shall be liable in negligence or otherwise in or arising out of the preparation or supply of any of the information.

WESTIR Ltd is partly funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

**WESTIR LTD**

ABN: 65 003 487 965 | ACN: 003 487 965



mail@westir.org.au



(02) 9635 7764



Suite 7, Level 2  
154 Marsden Street  
Parramatta, NSW 2150  
PO Box 136 Parramatta 2124

**NSW Parliamentary Inquiry:**  
**Current and future provision of health services in the South-West Sydney Growth Region**

On 14 July 2020, WESTIR Limited was invited as a witness to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the [current and future provision of health services in the South-West Sydney \(SWS\) Growth Region](#). The Inquiry's terms of reference can be reviewed [here](#).

The Inquiry was referred to the Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health, which is a committee of the NSW Legislative Council, in February 2020. The role of committee inquiries is to provide detailed investigation of public matters of interest, facilitate public participation in the parliamentary process, place a range of views on the public record, lead to policy and legislative change, and hold the NSW government to account.

WESTIR Limited Social Research and Information Officer, Amy Lawton appeared alongside Associate Professor Miriam Levy (Liverpool Hospital Medical Staff Council) and Dr Garry Helprin (Fairfield Hospital Medical Staff Council) on the first day of hearings to provide evidence on a report that WESTIR Limited had undertaken on behalf of the Liverpool Hospital Medical Staff Council in late 2018.

The WESTIR Limited report entitled '[Critical Condition: An insight into the pressures that impact Liverpool Hospital staff in servicing the needs of the community](#)' was cited by a number of inquiry [submissions](#), including the submission from the [Liverpool Hospital Medical Staff Council](#). The main report findings highlighted at the Inquiry hearing included:

- The SWS region was home to over 1 million residents in 2016, growing by 10.5% since 2011. It is expected to grow over 1.4 million residents by 2036, with large growth in the older age groups.
- When compared to other Local Health Districts (LHDs) in Greater Sydney, the SWS population experiences greater challenges on nearly every demographic indicator examined. This includes high socioeconomic disadvantage and unemployment, lower levels of English proficiency, high rates of humanitarian settlers, higher rates of disability and need for assistance, higher birth rates and rates of lifestyle-related diseases. These factors make it more difficult and costly for the local health system and its workforce to meet ongoing community need.
- SWS LHD had one of the lowest total annualised expense budgets per resident when compared to other LHDs in Greater Sydney between 2012/13 and 2017/18.
- Indicators such as the National Weighted Activity Unit (NWAU) and cost of acute encounters is more of a reflection of LHD medical staff being able to provide a cost-effective service in challenging circumstances rather than actual need. There is little to no funding to deal with the complex needs of residents outside existing funding arrangements and current "growth" money is used to fund base services.

- SWS LHD has a lower number of General Practitioners (GPs), resident medical officers and select specialists per 10,000 residents when compared to other LHDs in Greater Sydney. This is exacerbated by a generally lower number of health services than inner city areas, and lower levels of private beds and private health insurance which increases reliance on the public health system.

The WESTIR Limited report was able to support the evidence provided by senior doctors from Liverpool, Fairfield, Camden and Campbelltown Hospitals. The doctor's experiences of under-resourcing and lack of funding were alarming, with some examples shared provided below:

- The reduction of haemodialysis treatments from three to two times a week at Fairfield Hospital due to lack of funding.
- Lack of funding to hire a Head of Birthing Unit at Liverpool Hospital, despite it being recommended after a neonatal death at the hospital.
- Lengthy waiting times for standard procedures such as colonoscopies (approximately 500 days) and hip replacements (approximately 300 days) across all the major SWS hospitals.
- Lack of standard services after certain points in the day at Camden and Campbelltown Hospitals, such as ultrasounds and anaesthetic procedures.

The first day of the Inquiry's hearings was covered by major news channels and newspapers due to the alarming testimonies provided by senior hospital doctors (see links on the next page). The media stories highlighted the funding inequities experienced by the SWS LHD when compared to other Greater Sydney LHDs, with Greens MP, Cate Faehrmann stating that patients in the SWS region were being treated as "second class citizens". The doctors stressed that while the hospital redevelopments in the region were welcome, it needs to be met with an equivalent commitment to staffing and resources to meet both current and future population needs. It is hoped that this Inquiry will go some way to shining a light and addressing the challenges being experienced by the health system in the SWS region.

### **Media links:**

- [‘Doctors running major hospitals in Sydney's south-west say the health system is treating people living there as second class citizens’](#) (10 News First 5pm news story, 14 July 2020).
- [‘Doctors warn Sydney hospitals won't be able to cope with sustained coronavirus outbreak’](#) (7NEWS Sydney 6pm news story, 14 July 2020).
- [‘South West Sydney hospitals: young doctors committing suicide over workloads’](#) (The Daily Telegraph, 14 July 2020, Subscription required).
- [‘Doctor says south west Sydney residents are being treated as “second class citizens”](#) (Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser, 14 July 2020).

