

Wimmera Health Care Group
FOUNDATION

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“give where you live”

Ms Marie Aitken
Chairperson
Wimmera Health Care Group
Baillie Street
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partnering@whcg.org.au

15th February 2021

Dear Marie

WIMMERA HEALTH CARE GROUP AND BALLARAT HEALTH SERVICES STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS INITIATIVE

Thank you for your letter dated 20 January 2021 seeking feedback on a possible voluntary amalgamation of Wimmera Health Care Group with Ballarat Health Services. Directors of the Foundation attended recent community consultation sessions and we thank you for attending our meeting on Monday 8 February 2021 where you provided us with a further update and the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about the possible amalgamation.

Before we could even consider supporting such an amalgamation we would need to be assured of the following:

- That there would be no job losses in either Horsham or Dimboola – Wimmera Health Care Group employs 850 staff and is the largest employer in the Wimmera. Moving jobs outside our region would have a significant negative impact on our local economy and community both financially and culturally.
- Continuation of buying from and supporting local businesses – taking business away from Horsham and Dimboola would have a significant negative impact on our community and the local economy both financially and culturally.
- Retention of Wimmera Health Care Group’s identity and current governance arrangements. The community needs a local stand-alone Board that will continue to put the interests of our region’s residents first. Ballarat will no doubt have different and opposing priorities and the needs of our region would not be met.

- Retention and expansion of specialist, allied, acute, subacute, mental health and primary residential aged care services in Horsham and Dimboola. Understandably, there is a risk and perception that some services may be downgraded in Horsham and moved to Ballarat, especially acute and subacute care. Our region's population is ageing and we need more, not less, services in Horsham and Dimboola so that people can be treated locally. We need to see a reduction in people being required to travel to Ballarat and beyond for treatment and specialist services.
- That you have listened to your community and thoroughly and diligently researched every possible avenue to achieve the best possible outcomes for our community – we consider that further lobbying of State and Federal Governments for funding to deliver critical services in Horsham is needed.

Many questions, issues and concerns have been presented and no direct answers have been provided to date, especially in relation to the negative impacts such an amalgamation would have on the region's community and how they will be addressed. We implore you to listen to your community, provide them with more information and answer their questions. We also request an extension of the community consultation stage beyond 15 February 2021, so that people can fully consider what this will mean for Horsham and the wider Wimmera community.

As you are aware, the Foundation provides an important link between Wimmera Health Care Group and the community. We have a strong reputation in our community built on trust, confidence and professionalism, and this is evidenced by the significant support we receive from the local community and business sector through donations, bequests and fundraising. Through our "Give Where You Live" campaign, the Foundation's capital base has grown to approximately \$2.5 million in recent years.

For over 30 years, the Foundation has funded and supported numerous significant projects at Wimmera Health Care Group. These include: the Wimmera Cancer Centre, Kurrajong Lodge, Rotary House, adult and children's rehabilitation gardens and important surgical and clinical equipment, and many more. Many of these projects would not have been possible without the support of the Foundation.

Current community and business concerns regarding amalgamation leave us in no doubt that our fundraising proceeds will decrease significantly if an amalgamation were to proceed. This in turn will impact negatively on the support that the Foundation is able to provide to Wimmera Health Care Group in the future.

There appears to be an ever increasing groundswell of opposition to this amalgamation. The Foundation, together with a significant part of our community, are opposed to and extremely concerned about the possible amalgamation with Ballarat Health Services.

Yours sincerely



Graeme Hardman
Chairman
Wimmera Health Care Group Foundation



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15 February 2021

Graeme Hardman and the Foundation Board of Directors
foundation@whcg.org.au

Dear Graeme and the Foundation Board of Directors

Thank you for taking the time to engage with us and let us know your thoughts about the partnership review that we are undertaking. I can confirm that the Board has not made a decision.

We have listened to the community and have extended the consultation period to ensure that the Board has the opportunity to hear from as many community members as possible.

The Board is undertaking this review to look at ways to further enhance the partnerships between the health services to provide safe and accessible care closer to home. Any partnership options being explored would focus on enhancing service delivery and creating better health outcomes for local people across the Wimmera region. There would be no loss of services.

The Boards are undertaking this review as the Wimmera residents experience higher levels of chronic illness and ill health compared to the rest of rural and metropolitan Victoria. The Wimmera population is ageing and will need greater access to health care. Over the last 15 years, Wimmera Health Care Group has experienced increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining health care professionals (workforce / specialists), with gaps in a few critical clinical areas. The Board is exploring options to ensure the sustainability of health services for the future.

Your feedback will be included in the wide range of information that we have received from over 1,100 community and team members. We are analysing the information we have received from the consultation process and developing fact sheets and frequently asked questions and answers to a number of comments received. I have added your name to the stakeholder database to ensure that you receive all updates about the project

Thanks again for taking the time to let us know your thoughts on the project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Marie Aitken", is written in a cursive style.

Marie Aitken
Board Chair
Wimmera Health Care Group