

RURAL DOCTORS ASSOCIATION (NSW) INC

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Good hearing from NSW Health Minister over closed birthing unit at Pambula Hospital

Local Pambula doctors are pleased with the hearing they and the Pambula community received from the NSW Health Minister and Deputy Premier Carmel Tebbutt during talks on Wednesday over the re-opening of Pambula's closed maternity unit.

Local GP obstetrician Dr Frank Simonson attended the meeting with the Minister as part of a Pambula delegation, which included local health professionals, community members and entertainer Frankie J Holden.

Dr Simonson said while the Health Minister had not committed to re-opening the maternity unit immediately, she had listened with interest and indicated she would discuss the issue with the local Area Health Service.

The maternity ward at Pambula Hospital on the Far South Coast of NSW was shut down 12 months ago after a decision by the Greater Southern Area Health Service to operate a single obstetric unit at Bega, 30 kilometres away.

The closure of the maternity service resulted in the loss of four experienced GP obstetricians, and has forced women and their families to travel long distances to receive inadequate maternity care. Since the maternity unit closed, there have been a number of close calls involving pregnant women.

The Rural Doctors Association of NSW (RDA NSW) encourages Ms Tebbutt to now visit Pambula to see for herself the impact the closure has had on local families.

All four Pambula GP obstetricians are committed to resuming a local maternity service and have the support and backing of the local community.

An alternative maternity model for the Bega Valley which would allow the service to fit local conditions—including the location of doctors—should be considered, RDA NSW believes. This would allow births to continue in Bega and Pambula. Such models are working successfully in other parts of the State and allow women to continue to have their babies close to home.

Dr Simonson said it is concerning that the Area Health Service has failed to fully implement the Recommendations of its own Review of Maternity Services in the Bega Valley. After 12 months, only 7 of the 13 Recommendations have so far been met.

“This includes the recruitment of medical staff to Bega Hospital—one of the Review's key recommendations—leaving a maternity system run largely by locums at a cost up to \$2500 per day plus accommodation and travel,” Dr Simonson said.

“It is ludicrous that at a time when we are struggling to find enough doctors able to deliver babies in rural areas we are not being able to use our skills and experience. It's important the Area Health Services think outside the square and come up with answers that meet local needs and resources,” Dr Simonson said.

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