



The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP

Assistant Minister for Health

Member for Lyne

Mrs Lucy Wicks MP

Member for Robertson

Joint Media Release

17 March 2017

Coalition tackles local GP shortage head on

Steps towards solving the shortage of GPs in the Woy Woy area will be announced today after a public forum was called in response to concerns raised by residents and local GPs with the Federal Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie and Federal Member for Robertson, Lucy Wicks.

“Woy Woy has a large proportion of older people, and a high proportion of GPs who are approaching retirement age,” Dr Gillespie said.

“There is also a worrying lack of younger GPs and GP registrars joining local practices. Lucy has insisted we address the issue and I am pleased to say that she has brought me here today and I am keen to hear from local doctors and patients about the problems they are having now and what we may be able to do to attract more young doctors for the future.”

Dr Gillespie, the Minister responsible for health workforce, today announced that the Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network (PHN) will:

- Collaborate with GP Synergy, the regional training organisation responsible for the placement of AGPT registrars in the area, to develop strategies to increase GP registrar numbers and assess the number of GPs able to provide supervision and mentorship to medical students with consideration to the retirement age of GPs in the area.
- Evaluate and support GP succession planning, and
- Circulate information to the broader Central Coast and PHN regions to raise awareness and potential relocation of doctors from more densely populated GP regions.

The forum was called together by Ms Wicks in response to concerns raised by residents and local GPs in the Peninsula area. Dr Gillespie, who spent over 30 years as a medical practitioner in regional Australia, said that the Government is committed to ensuring that people in Woy Woy and all parts of Australia had access to the workforce they need.

Ms Wicks said she was keen to hear firsthand from local people about their experiences in accessing GP services.

“If patient books are closed and GPs are reducing their workloads, this can cause issues especially for people who are new to the area.”

“Obviously if patients are finding it hard to get a doctor’s appointment, I want to know why,” she said.

The chief executive of the PHN, Richard Nankervis, will also attend the forum. Dr Gillespie and Mrs Wicks said they were hopeful that the PHN would be able to use feedback from today's forum to fine tune its activities and strategies to ensure adequate access to GP care in future. The group will also raise the issue and seek advice from the Association of Medical Recruiters Australia & New Zealand.

Almost 20 per cent of people in the Robertson electorate are 65 years or older, compared to the national average of almost 15 per cent. In 2014-15, the Government provided \$1.1 million in incentive payments to general practices in the electorate of Robertson to encourage better access or patients, better health outcomes and other improvements.

"The Government takes this issue very seriously and provides generous incentives to doctors to move and stay in areas where they are needed most," Dr Gillespie said.

Dr Gillespie also said the new Central Coast Medical School would operate as a branch facility of the University of Newcastle and would provide additional medical students and young doctors, when it became operational. The Federal Government has committed \$32.5 million to the medical school, which will be co-located with Gosford Hospital.

**For more information, contact the Minister's Office on (02) 6277 4960
or Mrs Wicks' Office on 0422 993 373**