

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Devil in the detail of health service merger yet to be revealed

July 27 2004

Questions remain over the number of jobs to be lost in the New England north west community following an announcement today that the Hunter and New England Area services will merge, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper said.

Mr Draper said a glaring omission in the pages of information NSW Health Minister Morris Iemma released on the amalgamation were details on how the restructure would impact on administrative positions across the health service.

“The community will still have concerns over the number and nature of positions on the chopping block as the Minister is being deliberately vague on the subject, only referring in his press release to “a reduction in administrative positions over a period of approximately two years”.

“The community including NEAHS staff, doctors and nurses has been left feeling disenfranchised by the way this whole process has been handled,” he said.

Mr Draper said the community was always on the back foot when it came to the proposal as the Department provided no opportunity for input, and the detail of what was proposed was never made available for comment.

“I’m highly critical of the process undertaken by the Minister and his staff as they neglected to undertake a consultation process and only met with doctors after the plan to merge the health services was revealed.”

Mr Draper said he would hold Mr Iemma and the State Government accountable to a promise of pouring savings achieved through the sacking of area health service staff into frontline clinical services in the New England north west region.

“One of the cornerstones of the Minister’ argument in favour of the merger was to “unlock resources” tied up in bureaucracy and release them for front line health services in communities such as Tamworth and Armidale.

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“I intend to closely monitor how these savings will be achieved, and at what cost,” he said.

Mr Draper said his priorities were to ensure medical staffing levels were retained and enhanced, existing services especially in areas such as pathology and mental health were improved and guarantees of future investment in health service infrastructure were adhered to.

He said despite the uncertainty over jobs, the Minister had delivered some real positives to the region by way of improved services in mental and oral health and an enhanced teaching role at Tamworth Base Hospital.

“There are real issues in this region in regard to equity of access to dental health services and I’m pleased to see this being recognised.

Mr Draper said a \$500,000 boost to support the New England Area Mental Health Clinical Improvement Plan and the appointment of 5 full time equivalent Aboriginal Mental health worker positions was a pro-active move.

“I applaud the increased focus on the provision of mental health services as this is an area sorely lacking in resources. Health service workers and patients will also welcome the option of having access to mental health beds at Morisset.”

Mr Draper welcomed the appointment of Ian Sinclair to undertake a statewide consultation process ahead of the creation of Area Health Advisory Councils.

“As a former local representative Mr Sinclair will have a good grasp on what is needed to ensure the community has a say in the delivery of health services,” Mr Draper said.

End Release

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