



MEDIA RELEASE

Adrian Pederick MP JP

Member for Hammond
Parliamentary Secretary to the Liberal Leader for
- The River Murray
- Sustainability and Climate Change

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Country communities urged to fight for local health facilities

Country communities are being urged to fight for their local hospitals by signing a petition to protest the state government's decimation of country health services.

Local MP Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said the changes announced recently by Health Minister Hill will cut the heart out of country communities with most of the hospitals in the electorate reduced to first aid stations.

'The Minister justifies the changes saying that workforce shortages necessitate the consolidation and relocation of limited medical resources and the subsequent reduction of services at most country hospitals,' Mr Pederick said.

'Minister Hill concedes it is hard to find doctors for country towns but, by these changes, he is driving away those who have remained in the smaller regional centres until now.

'So the problem will get worse – a lot worse. If country doctors cannot practice fully, they have little choice but to pursue their careers elsewhere. Under the new system, once that happens the local hospital will lose its status, close, and the whole system will collapse.'

'How much further will the Minister prevail upon the goodwill of country doctors to carry the can for his government's failing to provide reasonable local services?'

Mr Pederick said there are eight hospitals serving residents in the Hammond electorate; Karoonda, Lameroo, Murray Bridge, Pinnaroo, Strathalbyn, Tailem Bend and two on the fringes at Meningie and Mannum.

'Under the plan, Murray Bridge will become a Country Community Hospital offering services 'in line with community need', and the others will be reduced to GP Plus Emergency Hospitals. This status does not allow them to admit patients: they can only maintain observation beds where the local workforce is sustainable,' Mr Pederick said.

'Note the word "sustainable". Under these conditions, why would a local GP want to stay and how are GP+ hospitals ever going to attract replacements? Without a GP, many of these hospitals are doomed.

'The government clearly expects Murray Bridge hospital to handle the increased numbers of in-patients now excluded from nearby country hospitals. Yet, despite spending \$11million there recently, it has one less bed than it used to. So much for forward thinking and regional planning.

'This government is taking education services away from the country, shifting public service jobs to the city, skimming health services and pulling out public transport. Banks and other businesses are leaving town and who can blame them?'

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'In the end, it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. People, especially professionals, cannot survive in communities that are shrinking. So we have 'fait accompli'; no services – no facilities - no doctors - no hospitals – no commerce – no population – no community. Mission accomplished. Now the government doesn't have to spend anything on the country.'

'I strongly urge country people to voice their objection to this seriously flawed plan and sign the petition requesting the government withdraw it. This government has a record of melting under pressure and the more people raise their voices, the more pressure there is. Copies of the petition are available through my office at 20 Mannum Rd, Murray Bridge, or phone 8531 1676.'

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