



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Health Minister agrees A Medical School in New England ‘a positive for rural health’

Independent member for New England, Tony Windsor today requested the Federal Government to outline its intentions relating to a medical school for the New England.

Mr Windsor asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, a question with regard to the establishment of a Medical School in the New England.

Mr Windsor’s question was, “Given the success of the University of Newcastle’s University Department of Rural Health already headquartered in Tamworth and the NSW Government’s announcement today that they will fund upgrades of the Tamworth and Armidale Hospitals if the Commonwealth provides 80 places for medical students, will the Minister inform the House of progress made in discussions on this matter?”

The Minister’s response was very encouraging saying it was a ‘good application’ put forward by the group and the ‘Government is considering it’. The Minister also said in part that a medical school in the New England ‘would be a positive for rural health.’

Mr Windsor agrees with evidence that indicates the shortage of graduates who are willing to practice in country areas is partly due to their training not taking place in the country.

“Students who go to the city to do their studies become involved in city life, forming relationships that make it very difficult for them to return to the country on completion of their courses.

The success of the University Department of Rural Health arrangement at the Tamworth Base Hospital and the development of a relationship between the University of New England, University of Newcastle and Hunter New England Health indicated that the next stage of the process should be a full blown medical school in New England,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said that the NSW Premier’s commitment to upgrading the Tamworth Base Hospital and Armidale Hospitals to ‘Teacher’ status is a big step in removing an impediment to the development of a medical school in country NSW.

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“The commitment given by NSW Premier to upgrade both the Tamworth and Armidale Hospitals to ‘teacher’ status paves the way for the Commonwealth Government to continue its commitment to training more country doctors and with the support of the University of New England that offers high quality nursing courses and the University of Newcastle that has a high quality medical school with a University of Rural Health located at Tamworth Base Hospital, it stands to reason that a full blown medical school would provide a very valuable addition to training medical students and encouraging them to then practice in the country.

Mr Windsor has, along with many people from the region, over many years been an advocate for the establishment of a medical school in the New England in association with the UNE and the region’s hospitals..

“Many people have worked very hard over a long period of time to have a medical school added to the University of New England’s learning opportunities.

I congratulate and thank all who have been involved in promoting this important extension to the region. I am delighted that it is now looks set to become a reality.

It has great community support from across the region and I look forward to the medical school playing its part in training and helping graduates to develop a love of the country and therefore practicing in the country after their graduation,” Mr Windsor said.