



In light of the recently released Parliamentary Report on Recommendations Relating to the Delivery of Specific Health Services and Specialist Care, Little Wings reaffirms its commitment to addressing the critical gaps in healthcare access for families in regional and remote areas. The report highlights the challenges faced by regional communities, including paediatric shortages, the demand for care exceeding available resources, and the financial burden of accessing healthcare. Little Wings has been at the forefront of alleviating these challenges, offering over 2,300 missions annually in FY24 alone and supporting thousands of families across New South Wales and Queensland since 2012. As a non-profit organisation, Little Wings provides free air and ground transport for seriously ill children and their families, ensuring they can access life-saving medical services in major cities. Little Wings further alleviates healthcare pressures through its Medical Wings Program, which acts as a crucial means of closing the gap of large waitlists and pressures on local paediatric services.

"Every child deserves access to quality healthcare, regardless of where they live," said Clare Pearson, CEO of Little Wings. "Our services are a lifeline for families who would otherwise struggle to reach the healthcare their children need. However, the demand for our services continues to grow, with regional waiting lists exacerbated and existing healthcare limitations, and we rely heavily on community support and government funding to sustain and expand our operations."

As per the report, the NSW Government is urged to take action to address the shortfall in paediatric services across hospital and community-based settings in RRR NSW. This should include consideration of increasing funding to provide early intervention programs with sustainable financial support. Early intervention is the cornerstone of positive health outcomes, yet many families in rural and remote areas face significant financial barriers, limiting decisions in seeking care.

Wings works to take away the financial burden, providing consistent, free and safe air and ground transport which acts as a lifeline for many families. For instance, 8-year-old Winnie Milson from Coonabarabran NSW has been travelling with Little Wings for several years after being born with a serious and lifelong digestive condition, and subsequently diseases that have seen her spend long periods of her life in hospital. Before being referred to Little Wings, her single mother Libby, had to take a second job and sell her furniture to fuel her car to make the long and repeated journey to Westmead Children's Hospital, a roughly 6-hour drive. By finding Little Wings, Libby's financial burdens were able to be addressed, taking the stress of affording these strenuous trips from Coonabarabran to Westmead out

of the equation. By focusing on funding non-emergency and ongoing services like Little Wings, the burdens of costs affecting many families can be eased.

Coonabarabran currently has a paediatric waiting list of over 250 children, the majority of whom are aged birth to 5 years, the most critical years for development.

Little Wings is addressing critical healthcare gaps in regional Australia by providing transport services and specialised clinics for families in need, bridging the gap between city-based and regional medical services and specialist access. The report highlights the significant challenges faced by communities in accessing paediatric care. As per the report, it was emphasised that there is a shortage of specialist GPs and allied health practitioners, combined with increased demand, has left many children, particularly those with developmental or mental health conditions, without access to care.

In response, Little Wings has established multiple Medical Wings clinics in partnership with local services and passionate community nurses to overcome these barriers. Over the past 14 months, the Warren clinic has been developed to address the current 48-patient waiting list in the town. This monthly clinic fly's doctor Mary Iskander from Bankstown to provide life-changing support. The work of Little Wings ensures that children are not disadvantaged because of their postcode, enabling them to access vital care during their first 1,000 days, which is considered a critical window for development where the foundations for future health, learning, and wellbeing are laid, making this time highly important for a child's life trajectory.

Lorraine's family from Warren exemplifies the immense challenges faced by regional communities. With no capacity for new paediatric patients in Dubbo (the nearest option) she would be forced to drive six hours to Sydney, take a week off work, and shoulder significant financial burdens to secure care for her twin daughters, Alisha and Alerah, who needed behavioural paediatric services. "Concerns of a behavioural nature are simply not accepted at all due to limited specialisations," the report highlights, drawing attention to the growing issue of behavioural and mental health needs in children across regional Australia. Thanks to the new clinic, the girls were seen by paediatric doctor Mary Iskander, bringing immense relief to Lorraine. Overjoyed, she shared, "This is the start. I just want the best for my girls—they need a paediatrician here... everybody's got different needs, they live differently... thank you for being here and for bringing a paediatrician out."

Furthermore, the report notes First Nations people living in remote, rural and regional (RRR) NSW have poorer health outcomes than their counterparts in major cities, including significantly lower life expectancies. For many Indigenous communities, being seen and cared for by fellow Indigenous healthcare providers holds profound significance. It goes beyond clinical care, embodying cultural

respect, understanding, and trust. Indigenous healthcare professionals often have deep insights into the unique challenges, traditions, and values of their communities, which can create a sense of belonging and comfort for patients, working to eliminate experiences of unacceptable discrimination in remote, rural and regional hospitals, and the current barriers to accessing culturally appropriate health services.

Addressing these inequities is essential, and Little Wings is taking meaningful steps to bridge this gap. Initiatives like the Medical Wings clinic in Wee Waa, prioritises Indigenous mental health and wellbeing checks, which are vital in providing accessible, culturally sensitive healthcare to First Nations families. The inspiring work of Ngiare Brown as the active doctor and proud Yuin nation woman from the south coast of NSW underscores the importance of representation and advocacy in healthcare. As the first identified Aboriginal medical graduate from NSW and one of the first Aboriginal doctors in Australia, her work has paved the way for systemic change and highlights the need for culturally appropriate services. Clinics like those supported by Little Wings ensure that Indigenous children and families have access to care that respects their culture and meets their health needs, making a profound difference in their lives and communities.

Little Wings calls on policymakers and individuals to recognise the vital role of NGOs like Little Wings in the healthcare landscape and to provide the necessary funding and resources to ensure these services can continue to thrive. Healthcare requires a consistent and long-term approach, with solutions applied to complex communities in need, looking to a collaboration between NGO services, government and LHD's. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of families facing unimaginable challenges.

Media Requests

For more information, images or to set up an interview with Clare Pearson please contact Erica on erica.scara@littlewings.org.au or 0438 955 897 or visit Little Wings website [here](#) and subscribe to our newsletter.

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