



Charles Sturt
University

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into matters affecting Regional Australia

Submission – 8 November 2019

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Charles Sturt University



8 November 2019

Mr Tony Pasin MP
Chair
Select Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6022, House of Representatives
Parliament House, 2600

Dear Mr Pasin

On behalf of Charles Sturt University, I am pleased to provide this submission to the Select Committee on Regional Australia's inquiry into matters affecting Regional Australia.

Charles Sturt University is Australia's largest regional university, with more than 45,000 students and approximately 2,400 FTE staff. Established in 1989, the University traces its origins to the formation of the Bathurst Experimental Farm and Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm in the 1890s.

Charles Sturt University's ethos is "For the Public Good", words used by Charles Sturt himself. In one form or another, research, innovation, education and regional Australia have been integral to the University's character and mission for more than a century.

Charles Sturt University is a unique multi-campus institution with campuses at Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Goulburn, Manly, Orange, Parramatta, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga, as well as various study centres located throughout regional and rural south-eastern Australia. The University's commitment to inclusive, sustainable and prosperous development of rural, regional, and remote Australia is informed by our unique research focus and the partnerships we have formed with each campus' local communities, neighbouring industry, and with the broader regions we serve.

Charles Sturt University welcomes the opportunity to continue to contribute to the regional policy debate, including providing analysis, commentary and recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

I would be very pleased to provide further information to the Committee and would be available to provide evidence at any hearing that the Committee may undertake.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrew Vann
Vice-Chancellor

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Terms of Reference

The House of Representatives on 25 July 2019 resolved that a Select Committee on Regional Australia be appointed to inquire into and report on;

- a. Examining the effectiveness of existing regional service delivery and development programs;
- b. Examining the contribution and role of regional Australia to our national identity, economy and environment;
- c. Promoting the development of regional centres, cities, towns and districts including promoting master planning of regional communities;
- d. Promoting private investment in regional centres and regional infrastructure;
- e. Examine the key drivers for unlocking decentralisation opportunities for both the private and public sectors;
- f. Promoting the competitive advantages of regional location for businesses;
- g. Investigate the development of capital city size regional centres in strategic locations and the benefits this offers regional cities, capital cities, the Australian economy and lifestyle;
- h. Examine the potential for new developments, towns and cities to be built in regional Australia;
- i. Examining international examples of nations who have vast and productive regional areas, which are sparsely populated;
- j. Examining ways urbanisation can be re-directed to achieve more balanced regional development;
- k. Identifying the infrastructure requirements for reliable and affordable health, education, transport, telecommunications, clean energy, water and waste in a new settlement of reasonable size, located away from existing infrastructure; and
- l. Consider other measures to support the ongoing growth and sustainability of regional Australia.

Executive Summary

Key points:

First class health care, educational facilities, internet and genuine career opportunities are vital if regional Australia is to grow and prosper.

Workforce

Regional Australia is being held back by significant workforce shortages in key industries such as agriculture and health care. Regional universities have the capacity to train more students in the regions, in the disciplines in which workforce shortages exist, providing graduates to address workforce shortages.

Health Care

There is a serious shortage of doctors and allied health professionals in regional areas and published research suggests this results in more disease and shorter life spans for regional residents. The evidence is that training students in the regions, results in the medical graduates staying in the regions and addressing this shortage. Government has taken some steps but there is more to do. Regional Australians deserve timely access to healthcare just as much as city Australians.

Regional Infrastructure

Some opportunities for private investment in infrastructure in the regions are being missed because education institutions are precluded from submitting project proposals to the Building Better Regions Fund.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation of government agencies, departments or parts thereof can provide economic drivers for regional centres, creating many downstream jobs, whilst offering genuine careers in regional areas - a key plank in attracting more residents and their families to the regions. Further, published research by the Australian Public Service Commission suggests decentralisation can improve the performance of government departments and agencies by growing their awareness outside of the capital cities.

Technological Connectivity

Technological connectivity online will be extremely important for regional Australia's future. Students studying in regional Australia need excellent connectivity to allow them access to opportunities in higher education. A good example of this is 5G, which is an enormous step up from 4G and will enable the Internet of Things. If 5G is available in capital cities and not in regional Australia, a deep divide will be created between city and country.

Data released in August 2019 by the Department of Employment <https://www.employment.gov.au/occupational-skill-shortages-information> identifies many workforce shortages; including in agriculture, health professions, accounting, engineering, dentistry, physiotherapy, nursing and teaching. The affected industries and their potential to contribute to the economy are being held back by an inability to access enough graduates. In regional Australia, the shortages are generally far worse. Charles Sturt University and other regional universities could be harnessed to address these skills shortages, which is impacting the growth and sustainability of regional Australia.

The shortage of doctors in the regions is acute and is clearly impacting the health of regional Australians.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2018 Rural and Remote Health report <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-remote-health> found:

“Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas.”

McGrail, Russell and Campbell's widely cited 2016 study <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2016/205/5/vocational-training-general-practitioners-rural-locations-critical-australian> clearly found the best way to fill regional doctor shortages was for students to train in the regions, concluding:

“This study provides new quantitative evidence of strong associations between rural GP vocational training location and subsequent rural practice location, which is strengthened when combined with rural origin.”

An expanded Murray Darling Medical Schools Network would see Charles Sturt University train more students in the regions to become regional doctors, addressing chronic doctor shortages and giving regional Australians timely access to health care.

The Building Better Regions Fund has been an effective program, with more than \$841 million invested by the Federal Government alone. The co-investment model has seen more than 300 infrastructure projects in regional Australia built due to local councils and other organisations working with the Federal Government.

However, regional Australia is potentially missing out on some projects which would be built if regional universities were allowed to also apply for the opportunity to co-invest with the Federal Government, to build projects of genuine community benefit. Many regional areas do not have the facilities city people take for granted.

Regional universities could add considerable value here and bring projects forward for consideration that would provide significant regional community benefit.

Our ethos “For the Public Good” compels us to advocate for decentralisation of government agencies, departments or parts thereof to regional centres. Regional Australians deserve the chance for meaningful public service careers just as much as city Australians, and public service jobs are a huge driver of downstream jobs. Public service careers should be a key offering regional centres.

Corporate decentralisation is unlikely to occur unless Governments demonstrate their own confidence in regional centres and lead by example through decentralisation. If governments led by example and put their employees in regional Australia, private companies would be more likely to follow.

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) found the Australian Public Service (APS) is already one of the most concentrated in the world, with around 35 per cent of employees based in Canberra – as opposed to 16.6 per cent for both London and Washington in the UK and the United States respectively.

<https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Human-Capital-Matters-Vol-2-2013- Decentralisation.docx>

The report also argues the public service often operates better in the regions. Former secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, now chair of the Centre for Policy Development Terry Moran says:

“The assumption that everything’s best if it’s located in Canberra is not actually paying dividends at the moment.”

Further, there are significant numbers of qualified people who want to live in regional centres. The Regional Investment Corporation established in Orange in 2018 and received 350 applications for 32 jobs, including for the highest qualified jobs

<https://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/5929608/farm-bank-a-decentralisation-success-as-staff-move-to-town/>

Students studying online in regional Australia need excellent connectivity to allow them to access opportunities in higher education

Charles Sturt University applauds the Federal Government’s Mobile Black Spots Program, which is delivering 1,047 mobile phone towers to regional Australia. Students studying online in regional Australia need excellent connectivity to allow them to access opportunities in higher education.

We note 5G is nearly upon us and point to the significant benefits this can bring to regional Australia. The 5G coverage will result in smart electronics and appliances being able to communicate with each other and make intelligent decisions. For example, farmers will have sensors in their soil which detect deficiencies in say water or nitrogen, and irrigations systems which then automatically water and supply nitrogen to that part of a paddock. In manufacturing, machines will likely be able to sense each other and communicate.

The 5G possibilities bring opportunity. However, if 5G is provided to regional Australia in a way that is not equitable with the delivery in the cities, it will create a digital divide and result in inequality between the cities and the regions.

Recommendations

- 1. The Commonwealth should consider ways to remove barriers to growth for regional universities, recognizing they can provide increased numbers of graduates to rural, regional and remote areas, addressing workforce shortages.**
- 2. The Murray Darling Medical Schools Network Commonwealth Supported Places must continue to be increased in order to address chronic doctor shortages in regional Australia.**
- 3. Regional Universities should be added to the list of organisations eligible to be Building Better Regions Fund proponents, where genuine regional community benefit can be demonstrated.**
- 4. Public agencies, government departments and parts thereof should be decentralised to regional centres whenever possible. Distributing Australia's population growth away from Melbourne and Sydney relies on meaningful careers, and health and education services being offered in the regions. City people should not have a monopoly on public service careers.**
- 5. Technological connectivity will be extremely important for regional Australia's future. Students studying on line in regional Australia need excellent connectivity, and future technologies such as 5G need to be equitable between city and country regions. Government should continue to review, publicly report on, and adjust regional communications policies across NBN and mobile phone coverage including 4G and 5G.**

Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University's stated aim, in the words of Charles Sturt himself, is "For the Public Good". Our motivation and reason for being is different to those of the city-based universities. This unique regional perspective and motivation drives everything we do.

This submission will focus on key areas in which Charles Sturt University can potentially play a direct role in helping grow regional Australia: addressing workforce shortages in vital areas such as health and agriculture, and co-investing with the Australian Government in infrastructure which benefits the regions. Charles Sturt University will also offer analysis and comment on other key regional issues such as technological connectivity and decentralisation.

Charles Sturt University is Australia's largest regional university, with more than 45,000 students taking more than 250 courses and approximately 2,400 FTE staff. Established in 1989, the University traces its origins to the Bathurst Experimental Farm and Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm in the 1890s. Research, innovation and regional Australia have been key parts of Charles Sturt University's mission for more than a century.

Charles Sturt University has campuses at Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Goulburn, Manly, Orange, Parramatta, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga, as well as various study centres located throughout regional and rural south-eastern Australia, including Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Wangaratta.

For four years running, Charles Sturt University has been named by the Good Universities Guide as the university which places the highest percentage of its students into full-time jobs.

The University attributes this success to its focus on producing graduates which meet the needs of industry - teaching practical content in practical courses which are co-designed by industry, and which include long-term industry placements as a key component. We are proud to be a market-facing university.

Charles Sturt University offers a comprehensive suite of research and academic training programs that focus on addressing rural and regional labour market needs, growing regional economies, and preparing students for the jobs of the new economy through rural and regional Australia. Charles Sturt University is a leading institution in providing higher education opportunities to first-in-family applicants, mature-aged students, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Increasing participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education has been a key focus and point of pride for Charles Sturt University. We graduate the highest number of Indigenous students of any university in Australia. We work consistently in collaboration with Indigenous communities across our footprint to ensure access and develop links into the University, and appointed former Aboriginal Health Cooperative Research Centre CEO and Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory Co-Commissioner Mr Mick Gooda to our Strategic Advisory Committee.

Research excellence, with a strong commitment to addressing complex regional needs through innovation, has long been at the centre of CSU's mission. Today, Charles Sturt University continues a 100-year tradition of engagement and leadership with our local communities, of research and innovation in collaboration with industry, expansion in the educational opportunities offered to our diverse student body, and preparing students for employment markets emerging with the evolution of regional and national economies.

1. The Commonwealth should consider ways to remove barriers to growth for regional universities, recognising they can provide increased numbers of graduates to rural, regional and remote areas, addressing workforce shortages.

A key issue facing regional Australia will be making sure city people who consider moving to the regions see good education opportunities for their children, good health care facilities and meaningful careers ready there for them. They want to know regional Australia provides all they need, and for this to occur, Australia must address skills shortages in its regions and grow its key industries sustainably.

Data released in August 2019 by the Department of Employment <https://www.employment.gov.au/occupational-skill-shortages-information> identifies many workforce shortages; including in agriculture, health professions, accounting, engineering, dentistry, physiotherapy, nursing and teaching. The affected industries and their potential to contribute to regional economies is being held back by an inability to access enough workforce.

The NSW regional data, covered by Charles Sturt University's footprint, reveals regional employers managed to fill only 32 per cent of their job vacancies for qualified construction industry employees https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/nswconstruction_trades.pdf while only 39 per cent of vacancies for qualified health professionals were filled in regional NSW. https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/healthprofessionalsnsw_2.pdf, as just two examples. There are also shortages of dentists, pharmacists, veterinary surgeons and a chronic shortage of agriculture graduates, which is discussed later in this document.

Charles Sturt University, with its huge footprint and range of courses right across regional NSW, is uniquely placed to help address this issue for regional Australians.

Our university motto, directly from Charles Sturt himself, is "For the Public Good." We aim to contribute to the sustainability of regional Australia. We offer a huge range of courses - more than 250 courses and 448 programs including specialisations. Our courses are already weighted towards the professions experiencing critical labour shortages in rural and regional Australia, including veterinary, dentistry, nursing, physiotherapy, pharmacy, accounting, teaching and policing.

We weight our student intake towards rural and regional students, with the view to retaining students in the regions to work in the industries in which there are shortages of tertiary qualified professionals.

For the past three years, Charles Sturt University has been the institution with the highest graduate employment rate in Australia, with 84 per cent of graduates fully employed within four months of graduation compared to national average of 69.5 per cent. <https://www.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/university-ratings-rankings/2020/overall-quality>

We're proud to be an industry-facing university. We discuss our courses with local industry to make sure our graduates meet their needs. Our students complete significant amounts of their time in industry placements. We aim for our students to get jobs in the regions and contribute to making regional Australia sustainable into the future.

Further, on average 80 per cent of our graduates go on to be employed in regional Australia. Our Pharmacy graduates have a 100 per cent full time employment rate four months after course completion; our Dentistry students have a 93 per cent full time employment rate. Our graduates earn the highest starting salary in NSW (\$62,000).

In 2018-19 we were rated 5 stars for full time employment, median salary, learner engagement and for having the most students who were the first in their family to attend University, by the Good Universities Guide.

Rural, regional and remote Australia has a well-documented shortage of health professionals, notably doctors, pharmacists and allied health professionals. The shortage is acute and has real impacts on the health of rural, regional and remote Australians, affecting everything from their life expectancies to their rates of chronic disease.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that the number of medical practitioners per head in rural and remote areas was 2.5 per 1000 people compared with 4.1 per 1000 in urban areas. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/workforce/overview>

Rural and regional Australians are often being forced to wait weeks to see a doctor – or missing out altogether, leaving conditions untreated, because of this shortage. Recently the Australian Medical Association's 2019 Rural Health Issues Survey named its top priority as:

"The need for extra funding and resources to support improved staffing levels at rural hospitals."

<https://ama.com.au/system/tdf/documents/AMA%202019%20Rural%20Health%20Issues%20Survey%20Report.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=50584>

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2018 Rural and Remote Health report found:

"Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas."

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-remote-health>

The National Rural Health Alliance, representing 37 rural and regional bodies, says an extra 3000 allied health places should be funded over four years. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/media-release/rural-australia-needs-allied-health-professionals>

CEO Mark Diamond says:

"We have people living in our remote and rural regions who don't know what optometrists or audiologists are, let alone having visited one, yet such professionals are readily available in our metropolitan cities. Do Australians think this is fair?"

"We acknowledge the Federal Coalition Government's \$550m commitment to fund 3000 additional doctors and 3000 additional nurses but doctors and nurses alone won't do it."

"We also need physiotherapists, psychologists, audiologists, social workers and many other allied health professions to be on the ground to provide the comprehensive care needed to address the woeful health statistics in our non-metropolitan regions."

Pharmacy Guild of Australia President George Tambassis has said:

"One of the innovative ways that you can approach this issue is trying to get students and interns before they get qualified to try have a taste of what it's like working in those rural or remote areas."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-06/pharmacist-shortage-worsens-in-northern-tasmania/10872708>

Tasmanian Pharmacy Guild President John Dowling has said he is worried patients may have to travel long distances to get their scripts, or could be delayed accessing their medication.

It's well documented and referenced that training people in regional Australia is the best way to get professionals to work in regional areas. City people trained in the city stay in the city, and often country people who train in the city then practice in the city after having put down roots, made friends and possibly met a partner. The best way to bring doctors and other allied health professionals to regional Australia is to train them in a regional area.

McGrail, Russell and Campbell's widely cited 2016 study

<https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2016/205/5/vocational-training-general-practitioners-rural-locations-critical-australian> concluded:

"This study provides new quantitative evidence of strong associations between rural GP vocational training location and subsequent rural practice location, which is strengthened when combined with rural origin."

It also found:

"During the study period, 610 doctors completed GP vocational training and commenced independent practice. 74–91% of rural origin/rural training cohort GPs remained in rural areas during their first 5 years after completing training, with 61–70% remaining in the same community. Conversely, 87–95% of metropolitan origin/metropolitan training cohort GPs remained in metropolitan areas. GPs from the other two cohorts initially remained in their training location type, but gradually moved towards their origin type."

The AMA's Position Statement - Rural Workforce Initiatives

<https://ama.com.au/ausmed/encouraging-more-doctors-go-rural> recognises this reality in a quote from President Dr Michael Gannon:

"Rural workforce policy must reflect the evidence. Doctors who come from a rural background, or who spend time training in a rural area, are more likely to take up long-term practice in a rural location."

Australian Governments have used initiatives such as subsidies to encourage doctors to practice in regional areas, such as the General Practice Rural Incentives

Program (GPRIP) <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/organisations/health-professionals/services/medicare/general-practice-rural-incentives-program> as well as State Government subsidies. In Dentistry, the Dental Relocation Infrastructure Support Scheme and the Dental Training Expanding Rural Placements program <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/work-review-australian-government-health-workforce-programs-toc~chapter-8-developing-dental-allied-health-workforce~chapter-8-dental-oral-health-workforce> have been tried but neither has fixed the problem. Requiring metropolitan universities to send their students into the regions for relatively short periods of time months does not mean they will practice in rural areas; the evidence is very clear that studying at a rural education facility does. Regional universities could train more allied health professionals and doctors than they currently do.

Regional Australia also has a well-documented shortage of agriculture graduates. The number of job advertisements for agriculture graduates is consistently multiples of the number of agriculture graduates in Australia in any given year. In 2018, the total number of job advertisements requiring an agriculture university graduate was 3653, yet the number of agriculture graduates that year in Australia was around 850. We await the exact number as these statistics take more than a year to arrive. (Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture, AG Institute EditionV28). In the four years 2015-18, the number of advertised jobs for agriculture university graduates has risen sharply from in 2,411 in 2015 to 3,076 in 2016, 3,599 in 2017 rising again to 3,653 in 2018 (unpublished data collated by the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture). The number of jobs advertised for non-management and lower-skilled workers was 1,108, then 1,506, 1509 and 1,886 respectively - far fewer than for qualified agriculture graduates.

Further making the point, the ABARES 2018 workforce report released in October 2019 found “Higher skilled vacancies were more difficult to fill” and that as farms grew larger, those farms became “less reliant on family (workers) and more reliant on workers with technical skills”.

“This highlights the importance of access to agricultural training to ensure Australians gain the skills and experience necessary to meet labour demand.”

In March 2019, National Farmers’ Federation CEO Tony Mahar, said “solving agriculture’s worker deficit (is) paramount to agriculture achieving a farm gate output value of \$100 billion by 2030”.

It is clear we need more agriculture graduates, particularly from and in the Murray-Darling Basin. Charles Sturt University produces more graduates who stay in regional Australia – on average 80 per cent of on campus students and 75 per cent of online students - which proves the assumption that to further skill the regional workforce requires educating people in the regions. Of interest we are educating more women than men across the agriculture disciplines, with the 2018 enrolment number 739 women and 677 men.

Charles Sturt University is uniquely placed to help address the shortage of high-skilled agricultural workers in Australia. In 2019, the percentages of agricultural graduates from Charles Sturt University in undergraduate degrees, post graduate degrees and research qualifications employed in the industry four months after course completion were 86.5, 90.5 and 100 per cent respectively. Placement of agricultural graduates into jobs is typically more than 10 percentage points higher than for other industries.

Charles Sturt University provides the largest cohort of Agricultural Science graduates in Australia and the only degree course in Horticulture. Charles Sturt University's schools of Animal and Veterinary Sciences and Agricultural and Wine Science combined with the Institute for Land, Water and Society provide ideal opportunities to teach and mentor the leaders of tomorrow as well provide partnership and collaboration opportunities for innovative cross-discipline research.

The AgriPark on the Wagga Wagga campus facilitates industry engagement and collaboration, economic growth, wealth creation, employment and skills development. The AgriPark also houses the Agricultural Technology Incubator. The AgriPark and AgriTech Incubator compliment Charles Sturt University's Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation and the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre, both of which are long term strategic partnerships between Charles Sturt University and the NSW Department of Primary Industries. Charles Sturt University can easily take more agriculture students and help to address the shortfall in agriculture graduates, which would help make farming more modern, efficient and sustainable as well as growing meaningful careers in the regions.

Charles Sturt University stands ready to work with governments, growers, businesses and all stakeholders to deliver the agriculture graduates we need, as we all strive to achieve a \$100 billion agricultural industry by 2030. Charles Sturt University is ready to join with the Commonwealth Government to help address the skill and workforce shortages that are impacting regional Australia's sustainability and growth.

2. The Murray Darling Medical Schools Network Commonwealth Supported Places must continue to be increased in order to address chronic doctor shortages in regional Australia.

Attracting new residents, jobs and economic development to the regions is difficult without quality medical services. Improving rural and regional medical outcomes is an important driver for ensuring sustainable population growth and investment in regional Australia. Aside from the economic argument, rural, regional and remote Australians deserve good access to healthcare as much as city people do.

The shortage of doctors in rural, regional and remote Australia is well documented. In its most recent workforce survey, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that the number of medical practitioners per head in rural and remote areas was 2.5 per 1000 people compared with 4.1 per 1000 in urban areas. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/workforce/overview>

Just months ago, the Australian Medical Association's 2019 Rural Health Issues Survey named its #1 priority as:

"The need for extra funding and resources to support improved staffing levels at rural hospitals."

<https://ama.com.au/system/tdf/documents/AMA%202019%20Rural%20Health%20Issues%20Survey%20Report.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=50584>

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2018 Rural and Remote Health report found:

"Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas."

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-remote-health>

The problem is not a lack of students obtaining medical qualifications; the problem is that our university system trains almost all of its medical students in the city. Australian universities are producing more medical graduates than ever <https://medicaldeans.org.au/data/> and the first Rural Health Strategy http://ruralhealth.org.au/documents/Attachment_A_MR_030417_FINAL_Time_for_a_dedicated_Rural_Health_Strategy.pdf was produced 24 years ago, yet still rural, regional and remote Australians face an acute shortage of doctors. Australia actually has more doctors per thousand residents than the OECD average; 3.6 doctors compared to an OECD average of 3.4 per thousand residents. <http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/health-data.htm>

The problem is most doctors in Australia, having finished their training in a city, choose to stay in the city. The vast majority of medical places are held by city universities and this has resulted in negative impacts for rural health in Australia. Rural, regional and remote Australians are suffering significant health issues because of a lack of doctors. Not only do the city-grown doctors remain in the city, but the country students who make it into a medical degree go to the city to university to study and in many cases, they never return to live and practice in the country. The best way to bring doctors to rural Australia is to train doctors in a rural area, and sourcing students of rural origin increases the likelihood of graduates practicing in rural areas.

McGrail, Russell and Campbell's widely cited 2016 study <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2016/205/5/vocational-training-general-practitioners-rural-locations-critical-australian> concluded:

"This study provides new quantitative evidence of strong associations between rural GP vocational training location and subsequent rural practice location, which is strengthened when combined with rural origin."

It also found:

"During the study period, 610 doctors completed GP vocational training and commenced independent practice. 74–91% of rural origin/rural training cohort GPs remained in rural areas during their first 5 years after completing training, with 61–70% remaining in the same community. Conversely, 87–95% of metropolitan origin/metropolitan training cohort GPs remained in metropolitan areas. GPs from the other two cohorts initially remained in their training location type, but gradually moved towards their origin type."

The AMA's Position Statement - Rural Workforce Initiatives

<https://ama.com.au/ausmed/encouraging-more-doctors-go-rural> recognises this reality in a quote from President, Dr Michael Gannon:

"Rural workforce policy must reflect the evidence. Doctors who come from a rural background, or who spend time training in a rural area, are more likely to take up long-term practice in a rural location."

A rural student who undertakes extended periods of training in a rural area is four times more likely to work in rural practice. However current policies don't support this. The vast majority of medical students must relocate to a major city for years to do their degree. Currently, 75 per cent of medical students spend less than 2 per cent of their degree in a rural area. This approach does little to maintain rural students' connection to their communities. The Federal Government has recognised these issues and acted, releasing the Stronger Rural Health Strategy in the 2018-19 Budget https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201819/RuralHealthWorkforce#_ftn1 and establishing the Murray Darling Medical Schools Network

Charles Sturt University applauds the Federal Government for beginning a genuine response to this very real problem and taking action. We ask the Government to build on its achievement creating the Murray Darling Medical School Network.

The Charles Sturt University and University of Western Sydney Joint Program in Medicine announced in the Stronger Rural Health Strategy at Orange will commence with 37 students. This is a start. The reality is there is much more to do. The University identified that at 37 the program will need ongoing subsidy. Expanding the numbers to 60 and beyond would result in far more doctors practicing in rural Australia, because Charles Sturt University will have the capacity to train people in a rural setting, often of rural origin, and this will result in those doctors practicing in rural Australia.

3.Regional universities should be added to the list of organisations eligible to be Building Better Regions Fund proponents, where genuine regional community benefit can be demonstrated.

The Federal Government's Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) sees local rural, regional and remote organisations including local councils spearhead infrastructure projects under a co-investment model with Federal, and sometimes also state, governments. The BBRF has resulted in more than \$841 million invested by the Federal Government alone into more than 300 infrastructure projects. The BBRF also funds smaller "Community Investment Stream" projects. The Federal Government has set aside some \$200 million for Round Four of the BBRF, expected to be announced sometime in 2019.

Under Round Three of the program, the eligibility criteria <https://www.business.gov.au/assistance/building-better-regions-fund#grant-opportunity-guidelines> section 4.2, "Who is not eligible?", states: "A university, technical college, school or hospital", among others. We assume this may have been due to a belief that such institutions had alternative access to capital funding.

However, Charles Sturt University believes that now, significant community benefit is being missed because of this criteria. There are many infrastructure projects which Charles Sturt University could co-invest in with Government which would produce significant regional community benefit. Indeed, many projects would provide regional communities with facilities they would never otherwise have received because they may not be financially viable for a rural university to build on its own.

As the BBRF has already funded billions of dollars' worth of projects and seen nearly a \$1 billion in Federal Government investment, it makes sense to review these guidelines and provide opportunities for regional universities to apply for projects where it is clear the project produces clear community benefit. Many regional areas do not have all the facilities city residents take for granted. The BBRF panel can refuse to fund any project if the panel believes the project does not produce the required community benefit. All applications should be treated on merit. Charles Sturt University suggests regional universities be given the chance to apply and demonstrate the huge community benefit they can produce, as part of projects the University would not have completed on its own.

4. Public agencies, government departments and parts thereof should be decentralised to regional centres, whenever possible. Distributing Australia's population growth away from Melbourne and Sydney relies on meaningful careers and health and education services being offered in the regions. City people should not have a monopoly on public service careers.

Charles Sturt University's ethos is "For the Public Good" and as such we believe it important to advocate for the decentralisation of government agencies and parts of departments to regional Australia. Public service jobs are a huge economic driver which produces many flow on jobs. Regional Australians deserve the same access to public service careers as Sydney and Melbourne residents do, and public service career opportunities could be an important part of the offering a regional centre makes to a potential resident family.

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) found the Australian Public Service (APS) is already one of the most concentrated in the world, with around 35 per cent of employees based in Canberra – as opposed to 16.6 per cent for both London and Washington in the UK and the United States respectively. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Human-Capital-Matters-Vol-2-2013-Decentralisation.docx>

The Australian Public Service Commission report finds decentralisation delivers substantial benefits – not only to regional communities that host relocated or new agencies, but for the nation and public policy formulation. The report cites a range of international studies and reviews highlighting the benefits of decentralisation experienced by other countries including the UK, Canada, Ireland, France, Germany, Norway and Japan. These benefits include:

- Bringing government closer to the people
- Promoting a more efficient public service
- Considerable cost benefits, such as cheaper premises costs
- Better service delivery
- Regional growth and regeneration.

The report also makes clear that "policy" roles and other senior positions have been "successfully relocated in the past".

Former secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, now chair of the Centre for Policy Development, Terry Moran says:

"The assumption that everything's best if it's located in Canberra is not actually paying dividends at the moment.

"Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo have... a significant university presence, a significant TAFE presence, public and private schooling available, and significant cultural assets in the visual and performing arts.

"In other words in those three cities you have the preconditions for an appealing life for the sort of people you'd hope were willing to work in senior positions in government.

<https://www.themandarin.com.au/91478-the-great-decentralisation-debate-how-to-shift-jobs-well-or-badly/>

Although Mr Moran speaks principally about Victoria, his points are valid across regional Australia. Australians want to live in areas which have a good university presence, education, health and cultural opportunities. Decentralisation actually helps create those things in a regional centre. Albury-Wodonga, Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Orange, Bathurst and Port Macquarie are all ideal candidates for decentralisation of government agencies or departments or parts thereof.

The Commonwealth public service currently comprises 107 federal departments, agencies and entities <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/australian-public-service-agencies> . There are more than 150,000 people employed in the Australian Public Service <http://www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/aps-statistical-bulletin/december-2016> .

Since the early 1960's, much of the push for decentralisation of government functions and services has been in response to growing concerns about the concentration of the Australian population in capital cities, and the need to encourage stronger development and settlement in regional areas. In 1973, the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, in partnership with the Victorian and New South Wales Governments, established the Albury-Wodonga Growth Centre project. The aim of the project was to progress the development of Albury- Wodonga as a major regional hub, and to "relieve the problems of what was seen as overpopulation in Sydney and Melbourne" https://eservice.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/portal/Temp/TrimDocumentViewer_913850_awCfGoEMDu.PDF .

It seems the over-crowding of Sydney and Melbourne was a political issue even in the 1970s. The Growth Centre project was essentially established as an "experiment"; a project that might be used as a model for other regional areas. Over the following decades however the project was revised by successive governments and the population targets reduced. The experiment formally ended in 1995, however it left a lasting legacy of a great decentralisation success: a major regional office of the Australian Taxation Office, which houses more than 500 employees in Albury. Incidentally, Albury is a thriving regional centre often thought of as more cosmopolitan than other regional centres.

There are several large Commonwealth government agencies which are successful examples of decentralisation:

- The Grains Research and Development Corporation has established offices in Adelaide, Perth, Dubbo, and Toowoomba. Its head office remains in Canberra;
- The Australian Securities and Investment Commission was established in Traralgon in the 1990s,
- The Australian Tax Office has a major office in Albury,
- The Regional Investment Corporation was established in Orange in 2018 and received 350 applications for 32 jobs, including for the highest qualified jobs

<https://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/5929608/farm-bank-a-decentralisation-success-as-staff-move-to-town/> .

Some employees of the Murray Darling Basin Authority are based in various parts of the Basin, with the 2018 announcement of the decentralisation of more than 100 employees to Mildura, Griffith, Murray Bridge and Goondiwindi.

Furthermore, Centrelink has more than 20 regionally located call centres across the country in regional centres including Bunbury and Traralgon. Interestingly, regional centre Traralgon with its population of around 24,000 people, which houses nearly 1000 jobs both between ASIC and a large Centrelink call centre, has managed to keep good socio-economic status while nearby Morwell and Moe have slid backwards as jobs in mining contracted.

At the state level, examples of decentralisation of government services from capital cities to regional towns include:

- The NSW Department of Agriculture moved to Orange in 1992 and remains there;
- The Victorian Transport Accident Commission moved to Geelong in 2009,
- The NSW Office of Local Government moved to Nowra,
- The NSW Department of Mineral Resources moved from Sydney to Maitland,
- The Western Australian Department of Water moved from Perth to Mandurah.

Another reason decentralisation is key to regional Australia is it helps keep home-grown brains in regional areas, rather than them moving to the cities to pursue an interesting career. The brain drain in the country then results in a depleted workforce which means corporates either won't locate offices in the regions, or even worse, remove regional offices and put them back in capital cities. In April 2016, Target – a large retailer with shops in each state and territory of Australia - announced that it was re-locating its headquarters from Geelong to Melbourne with the transfer of approximately 900 jobs. In 2011, Telstra closed down its regional call centre in Moe, eastern Victoria. A new Telstra call centre in Melbourne's Docklands, with more than 1,100 operators, was expected to take most of the Telstra customer calls that had been handled in Moe, with overflow now handled in call centres in the Philippines. <http://www.smh.com.au//breaking-news-national/telstra-workers-at-moe-to-be-laid-off>

If we want vibrant regions we need the vibrant, energetic people to have a reason to live there, and a meaningful public service career can be such a reason. Country people need opportunities for careers, not just jobs.

A way of growing public sector careers in regional centres would be for Government to inform Departments and agencies that:

- The APS employment cap is lifted in regional areas, thus allowing Departments to put on more staff than they currently have so long as the new staff are hired and work in regional areas, and
- All hires (most of which are replacing attrition) in the public service must have consideration given to being placed in the regions.

These strategies mean there is no payout budget required to supply redundancy packages to current employees as there is when an agency is moved, although the impact and benefit to the regional centre will arrive more gradually. There is no reason, for instance, for Centrelink to maintain major call centres in Sydney, Canberra or Melbourne. Those jobs could easily be located in regional centres. The same goes for Australia Post. Departments which oppose the APS cap and increasing spend on consultants <https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/mps-alarmed-at-government-consultancy-spending-20180119-h0kvqz> could hire outside capital cities outside the APS cap and reduce their spend on contractors and consultants, instead having that capacity and expertise in-house. In the age of NBN and video conferencing, there are very few staff who genuinely need to be in Canberra for face-to-face meetings with the Minister or Departmental Secretary.

Of course, corporate decentralisation could play a key part also. However if Government is not taking the lead by decentralising agencies, departments or their parts to regional areas then corporate Australia can hardly be expected to. Regional Australia needs to become the obvious place to open a new business or office of an existing one and Government needs to lead by showing confidence in the regions. We need to make business leaders more aware of the advantages of regional Australia. A key issue will be access to first-class broadband and particularly transformational 5G.

Some examples of corporate decentralisation in Australia include:

- Hoffman Engineering is a specialist engineering company that was started in Perth, Western Australia, in 1969 and now operates in five cities (including overseas), employing over 500 people. In 2010, the company established its eastern operations in Bendigo, Victoria. In doing so, it created approximately 65 local jobs in heavy engineering.
- Keech Australia, has been designing and manufacturing steel products for mining, excavation, construction, agriculture, rail transport and defence, for over 80 years. In 1995, Keech moved from its Mascot foundry in NSW, to expanded premises on 11 acres in Bendigo, Victoria, where its foundry and head office are now located
- Macquarie Bank's Paraway Pastoral fund moved to Orange, NSW, in 2015 taking staff from Sydney and across NSW, as well as employing people from Orange.

Decentralisation can play a vital role in the development of our regional cities. Decentralisation can help grow regional populations to ensure internationally competitive relevance, increased standard of living and improved quality of life. It is only fair to share economic, social and environmental access and equity between regional and metropolitan Australia. Decentralisation can also help diversify regional economies, making them more resilient and drought proof.

5. Technological connectivity will be extremely important for regional Australia's future. Students studying on line in regional Australia need excellent connectivity and future technologies such as 5G need to be equitable between city and country regions. Government should continue to review, publicly report on, and adjust regional communications policies across NBN and mobile phone coverage including 4G and 5G.

CSU applauds the Federal Government for its Mobile Phone Blackspots Program (MPBS). This \$380 million program has already seen some 1,047 mobile phone towers installed in regional Australia, hugely boosting the connectivity of the regions. The MBSP has so far seen a total of more than \$760 million invested and CSU applauds the Government's move to allocate another \$160 million to rounds five and six of the program.

<https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/mobile-services-and-coverage/mobile-black-spot-program>

Students studying online in regional Australia need excellent connectivity to allow them to access opportunities in higher education.

First-class internet access promises to remove the tyranny of distance and make our regional cities and country towns global. It will enable businesses to finally be able to choose to locate themselves and their resulting jobs in regional areas, taking advantage of reduced rental costs and a better standard of living. Additionally, teleworking, which refers to "an arrangement whereby an employee has a formal agreement with their employer to work in a location other than the office, usually a home office", promises to deliver high value, high quality career options for people in our regional cities, and could also attract the professional classes from metropolitan centres. Teleworking relies largely on information and communications technology to keep employees connected to colleagues and work systems.

The Australian Public Service Commission cites a number of benefits teleworking provides for the employee and employers. For the employee, these include cost savings by not having to travel to work, flexibility in work hours thereby increasing an employee's ability to manage work-life balance, increased job satisfaction, and a greater ability to participate in the workforce. For the employer, the benefits of teleworking include improved recruitment and retention outcomes, reduced absenteeism, increased business resilience, reduced costs associated with office space and increased productivity. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/SOSR-2012-13-chapter-9.pdf>

The National Broadband Network will be a crucial enabler for decentralisation in regional and rural areas. A lack of access to reliable and fast broadband effectively removes an unconnected area as an option to host government agencies or new businesses. Charles Sturt University believes the Federal Government should continue to closely monitor the roll out of the Sky Muster satellite, Fixed Wireless network and fibre as it currently does through multiple processes. It should also consider upgrading NBN connections in the central business district of regional centres as this would spur business growth.

"5G" refers to the fifth generation of mobile technology, in line with the International Mobile Telecommunications-2020 (IMT-2020) Standard of the International Telecommunications Union and the associated releases of the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP). The 5G technology is an enormous step up from 4G. Deployed correctly, 5G has the potential to address the city-country divide. Deployed only in the cities, 5G would however only deepen and widen the city- country divide.

If it is the case that ensuring regional, rural and remote Australia receives 5G requires a Mobile Black Spots Program type arrangement, then this should be considered and executed before the divide begins.

It is widely recognised that 5G will transform the way we live and work, and provide as yet unknown future opportunities for economic prosperity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. For instance, 5G brings with it the capability to run the Internet of Things (IOT), a term which broadly refers to electronic devices and intelligent appliances which can communicate with each other.

In agriculture, the IOT will mean farmers can have sensors monitor temperature, rainfall, humidity, wind speed, pests, and soil content, sending all the information to a tablet, computer or smart phone. The related systems can then respond – for example, after soil sensors detect one corner of a farmer's paddock is too dry, the irrigation system could automatically apply the appropriate volume of water to the dry area of the paddock. Likewise the system could detect part of a farm had become moist because of rainfall and shut off irrigation until such time as that section of the farm again dried out, so as not to waste water which crops or trees would not use. Sensors could detect soil was lacking a certain element and appropriate fertiliser could be automatically and immediately applied.

In manufacturing businesses, the IOT could see machines communicating with each other to fill or box orders. Further, the IOT has huge benefits for health, including for elderly people. A resident's house could detect when its occupant has had a fall and immediately call for help. Appliances within the house could be controlled by voice control, greatly helping those with limited mobility. Fridges could detect when the household is running low on a certain food, and could order it to be delivered to the house. Vehicles will be able to detect and communicate with each other (this is already reality) and also communicate with the road, which could for example send a message to a vehicle being driven by automation to warn it there is an obstruction on the road ahead. If capital cities receive these benefits for businesses and residents but rural, regional and remote Australia does not, inequality will follow.

It is vital the roll-out of 5G in Australia enables access and equity for all Australians. It will be crucial to ensure that disadvantaged populations and lower SES people are not excluded from the opportunities that 5G promises. Indeed, without effective management of the emerging 5G telecommunications market by governments, the roll-out of 5G may inadvertently broaden and deepen the digital divide. Managed effectively, 5G technologies provide opportunities for addressing generational social disadvantage by connecting communities, broadening the reach of education and training and strengthening healthcare delivery. Further, it will be important that government assist the private sector to acquire the capability, secure that capacity and deploy 5G across non-metropolitan Australia. The fact is 5G promises exciting futures for Australians living, studying and working in our regional cities, rural towns and remote communities - so long as they get access to it.

Deployed to ensure access and maintain equity, 5G has the potential to bring city and country together and reduce the digital divide between the regions and our capital cities. This is highly likely to lead to a surge in migration from our capital cities to our regional cities and rural towns - a stated aim of the Federal Government. 5G will be significantly faster than current mobile network technology, delivering more capacity and faster mobile data speeds for consumers.

Realisation of the IOT will lead to the creation of new business models and innovation of exciting products and services to meet these market needs, for example, the on farm, infield, remote management of irrigation, crops, animals and weeds. This in turn, will underwrite the establishment and development of the next generation of our new businesses and will guarantee our next wave of regional productivity.