Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry for Regional Development and Decentralisation

Dear Contact Officer

The Board of Management of Alpine Health lodges the attached submission to the Inquiry for Regional Development and Decentralisation.

We would appreciate an opportunity to enlarge on the matters presented and respond to questions from the Inquiry.

Kind regards

Brian T King OAM
Chairman

Please address all correspondence to:
Chief Executive Officer
Alpine Health
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Submission of Alpine Health to the
Federal Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation

The Inquiry poses the questions:

- What are you as an individual or organisation doing well?
- What works in your community?
- What does there need to be more of?
- What roles do you see for State and Federal Governments?

Synopsis

Alpine Health, a multi-purpose health service located in northeast Victoria, has shown that innovation is the key to success. Trading on the ethic that "Local means local", Alpine Health has developed from an assemblage of three small health services in 1996 to become the largest employer in Alpine Shire, a sought after provider of home care services and a training provider of much-needed nurse education programs both locally and nationally. Alpine Institute is currently seeking to launch internationally.

We at Alpine Health strongly believe in "Local means local" and our committed staff look forward to providing ongoing community health support into the future.

Yet the long-term sustainability of all our achievement is threatened. Our plans to replace ageing infrastructure have not been supported by Government, and our core function ability to provide modern aged care facilities for locals has been eroded by Government funding support for private enterprise facilities in Bright and Myrtleford. This is a fundamental flaw that can only be overcome by new Government investment.

Based on our strong record of excellent management and innovation, Alpine Health seeks the Inquiry's support in endorsing our need for vital funding for the infrastructure renewal that is essential to us continuing to deliver our core functions to the local community into the future.

The investment required to place Alpine Health in a viable position for service delivery into the future pales into insignificance, when compared with the fully absorbed cost of the staffing, infrastructure and technology required to decentralise departments.

Preamble

Alpine Health is a multi-purpose health service that was established in November 1996 through the amalgamation of three smaller local health services to meet the health needs of the people in the Alpine Shire. It is the largest Multi-Purpose Service in Australia, and the largest single employer in the Alpine Shire.

Services are provided in Bright, Mount Beauty and Myrtleford consistent with the philosophy of service provision as close as possible to where people live – on the "Local means local" principle. Service provision is grouped into three broad areas – acute hospital based services, residential aged care services, education and training, and primary care services.

Acute hospital based services comprise nine beds in Bright, ten beds in Mount Beauty and fifteen beds in Myrtleford. These services also include perinatal services, some outpatient and day based surgical and endoscopy services, and X-ray services. Birthing services were suspended in early 2016 due to low demand.

Urgent care services are also provided. Locals and visitors increasingly call on this service, which is unfunded. Residential aged care services comprise 30 high care places in Myrtleford, 20 high care places in Mount Beauty and 40 low care places in Bright.

The Alpine Institute, established in 2012, provides education and training for Alpine Health and the wider community. The Institute provides certificate 2, 3 and 4 courses in health and community related courses. Training for overseas graduate nurses enables them to gain registration to practice in Australia through the Initial Training for Overseas Nurses or IRON program, in partnership with Lonsdale Institute. A certificate level program – Diploma of Nursing – is currently in development for delivery in the 2018/2019 financial year. Alpine Institute is currently seeking to launch internationally.

Primary care services include community development, early intervention, health promotion and community care, and volunteer services. Services cover all age groups and are delivered in people's homes, in schools, workplaces, churches and at public functions and events. "Local means local".

What Alpine Health is doing well?

Alpine Health provides a comprehensive range of services in acute care, aged and community care for residents of the Alpine Shire delivered on a "Local means local" basis. Services are delivered from Alpine Health facilities in Bright, Myrtleford, and Mt Beauty and directly to people in their homes. This list shows the scope of our services.

- Alpine Community Health Centre
- Acute Medical Inpatient Care
- Aged Care Services
- Alpine Leisure Groups
- Anti Natal and Maternity Care
- Community Aged Care Packages
- Day Surgery (minor procedures)
- Diabetes Education and support
- Dietetics
- District Nursing Service (including Hospital in the Home, Post Acute Care)
- Education – Alpine Institute
- Health Promotion
- Midwifery
- Medical Imaging
- Men's Sheds
- Nursing Care
- Nursing Education
- Pain management
- Palliative Care
- Pathology
- Podiatry
- Post-Acute Care
- Radiology
- Regional Health Program
- Renal Dialysis
- Residential Aged Care
- Respite Care
- Rural Child Adolescent Program
- Urgent Care Services
- Youth Services

Alpine Health is fortunate to have a group of dedicated professionals and enthusiastic volunteers providing these services, every day, to community members on a "Local means local" basis.

Alpine Health is an example of the synergies that small communities can deliver without significant investment. Two examples illustrate our leadership in delivering an excellent standard of service to the community.

Alpine Institute

Alpine Institute is Alpine Institute was formed in 2012 to manage Alpine Health's growing commitment to training and education and is a registered training organisation providing health based certificate courses. Initially established as a facility for Alpine Health staff to access training, the Alpine Institute has expanded to provide opportunities for staff, international students, and individuals seeking training, development and work opportunities within health and community service sectors.

Institute trainees supplement Alpine Health staff and when qualified fill vacancies locally, statewide and nationally. The Institute provides an opportunity for local residents to enter or return to the health care industry without having to travel long distances to do so.

Alpine Institute focuses strongly on establishing courses and training opportunities capable of meeting workforce demand within the health sector. The Institutes connection with Alpine Health has enhanced this position. The courses are designed and delivered by health professionals with current employment within the health sector, ensuring the knowledge and learnings students receive is current, relevant and reflective of health, community and industry needs.

Alpine Institute is now accredited to deliver a range of nationally recognised qualifications and provides courses in health services including Certificate III in Home and Community Care and Aged Care, and Certificate III Health Services Assistance. Alpine Institute's nationally recognised qualifications provide articulated pathways to further studies in health and community services.

The Institute provides certificate 2, 3 and 4 courses in health and community related courses. Training for overseas graduate nurses enables them to gain registration to practice in Australia through the Initial Training for Overseas Nurses or IRON program, in partnership with Lonsdale Institute. A certificate level program – Diploma of Nursing – is currently in development for delivery in the 2018/2019 financial year.

Alpine Institute is currently seeking to launch internationally.

Alpine@Home Community Care

Alpine@Home community care services are designed to support people to live independently in their homes, particularly those who are frail aged or have a moderate to severe disability. Support can also be provided to the children and/ or carers of these people.

Home Care Packages (HCPs) are planned and coordinated packages of care individually tailored to help frail older people remain living in their own homes. The types of services that may be provided as part of a care package include case management, personal care, nursing care, social support, transport to appointments, home help, meal preparation or meals on wheels, gardening and home maintenance, advocacy, or access to Allied Health professionals.

In the "My Home Care" era of packages allocated to clients who then make an active choice of their service provider, it is gratifying to see the flow of consumer choice to "Alpine@Home", aligning with the principle of "Local means local" but this time in reverse – with customers preferring to engage Alpine Health as their preferred service provider.

What works in your community?

The Alpine Shire communities are strongly supportive of Alpine Health. This is amply demonstrated by the ready availability of volunteers at many levels. Service Clubs have made significant contributions to Alpine Health, often in response to the need for new equipment to save patients travelling to larger centres.

Bright, Mt Beauty and Myrtleford have Community Health and Advisory Groups to provide feedback to the Board of Management. All three centres have Opportunity Shops selling recycled goods that deliver considerable resources for equipment purchase and other initiatives in their respective centres.

There is a seemingly never-ending flow of willing volunteers to provide supplementary services to the community through Alpine health programs. The Alpine Shire communities not only endorse but expect service delivery to be on the basis of "Local means local".

What does there need to be more of?

It is easy to understand the support of Government for the health services in large population centres. However there needs to be more government recognition of the needs of rural and remote communities as it is clear that residents do not have the same level of access to health services and travel to distant centres is often the norm.

Government is heavily focussed on the larger scale picture, for instance in funding systems for service delivery based on throughput or numbers treated. In regional development terms, this results in investment in large regional communities not small ones. Smaller regional and rural and remote communities like the Alpine Shire miss out. Decentralisation can't just stop at Albury/Wodonga, Shepparton, Geelong and Bendigo.

Alpine Health presents a viable alternative platform to efficiently provide health services to residents of a large rural area who would otherwise need to travel up to several hours to obtain these services from a regional centre. This should be decreasing into the future as Governments see fit to invest in upgrades to Alpine Health technology and facilities. This is not happening.

The preference of Government is to fund private enterprise "user pays" aged care services in our major centres in direct competition with the supply of aged care services by Alpine Health. We are at a distinct disadvantage with private enterprise, as our facilities do not offer the comfort and convenience of modern design and construction.

Much of the Alpine Health infrastructure dates from sixty years ago and does not match the needs of modern health care. It is taxing for both staff and patients. The Board of Management has plans and upgrades that have not been financed by Government, so that basic patient care and staff OHS working conditions are increasingly being impacted.

In an era when Government finance is routinely measured in billions, both staff and clients of Alpine Health are disappointed that their planned renovations cannot be realised due to lack of funding seen as relatively minor in today's terms.

They are further disappointed by the ready flow of capital to state of the art private aged care facilities that compete unfairly with one of Alpine health's core functions.

What roles do you see for State and Federal Governments?

Alpine Health, a multi-purpose health service in northeast Victoria, has shown that innovation is the key to success. Trading on the ethic that "Local means local", Alpine Health has developed from a humble assemblage of three small health services in 1996 to the largest employer in Alpine Shire, a sought after provider of home care services and a training provider that is seeking to launch much-needed nurse education programs locally, nationally, and internationally.

We at Alpine Health strongly believe in "Local means local" and our committed staff look forward to providing ongoing community health support into the future.

Alpine Health is a prime example of the synergies small communities can deliver without significant investment. However our long-term sustainability is under threat. Our plans to replace ageing infrastructure have not been supported by Government, and our core function ability to provide modern aged care facilities for locals has been eroded by Government support for private enterprise facilities in Bright and Myrtleford. This is a fundamental flaw that can only be overcome by new Government investment.

The investment required to place Alpine Health in a viable position for service delivery into the future pales into insignificance when compared with the fully absorbed cost of the staffing, infrastructure and technology required to decentralise departments.

Based on our strong record of excellent management and innovation, Alpine Health seeks the Inquiry's support in endorsing our need for vital funding for infrastructure renewal that is essential to us delivering our core functions into the future.

Submission on behalf of the Board of Management of Alpine Health.

Brian T King OAM
Chairman
Alpine Health Board of Management