



**Letter of Transmittal**

HealthWISE  
117 Faulkner Street  
Armidale NSW 2350  
PH: (02) 6771 1146

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
[migration@aph.gov.au](mailto:migration@aph.gov.au)

10 February 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration - The role of permanent migration in nation building**

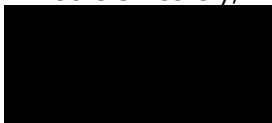
New England North West Health Ltd. (HealthWISE New England North West) is a 'for purpose' (not for profit), registered charity delivering primary care programs and clinical services across the New England and North West regions of New South Wales and the Darling Downs and West Moreton regions of Queensland; across the following federal electorates: Blair, Flynn, Groom, Maranoa, New England, Parkes, Wide Bay and Wright.

HealthWISE is a major regional/rural provider of mental health, Aboriginal health, allied health (including speech pathology and dietetics) and primary health care nursing services. Our current programs also include care navigation services to the Ezidi community in Armidale and support for 17 Local Government Areas in New South Wales and Queensland in recovering from the Black Summer bushfires. The majority of HealthWISE services are provided free of cost to the client, made possible through funding from a range of government and non-government agencies, primarily, Primary Health Networks.

Recruitment and retention of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is vital to the delivery of primary health services in rural Australia and is a constant challenge for our organisation and others like us, operating in non-metropolitan areas of Australia.

We ask the inquiry to consider variations to the requirements of migrants seeking permanent residency to make working in rural and regional Australia more attractive for workers, and in turn, allow improved access to primary and preventative health services for all Australians.

Yours Sincerely,



Fiona Strang, CEO, HealthWISE



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W: [healthwise.org.au](http://healthwise.org.au)



## Response to the Terms of Reference:

*Immigration as a strategic enabler of vibrant economies and socially sustainable communities in our cities and regional hubs*

*The role of settlement services and vocational training in utilising migrant experiences, knowledge, and opportunities;*

## Recommendations:

- 1. Review the categories included in skilled migrant visas to ensure that migrants with knowledge and experience are valued, as well as manual labour skills, to meet the gaps that currently exist in communities.**

Doctors and nurses who enter Australia as migrants underpin regional communities. All professional roles within health are in shortage. The inclusion of metropolitan locations and larger regional cities as part of the expansion of the Distribution Priority Area (DPA) in 2022, has had an immediate impact on access to GPs in our communities.

We aim to recruit more skilled migrants to fill workforce shortages across primary health, and an improved pathway to permanent residency would increase the pool of candidates we have and improve the longevity of employees.

- 2. Reduce the costs and delays in processing visa application from skilled migrants.**

Skilled migrants have been crucial in filling workforce gaps in health care (Speech Pathology and Dietetics), preventative health and information technology roles and enabling our business to grow and thrive. These individuals have enriched the organisation's staff and clients with skills, networks, diversity of thought and entrepreneurial ideas.

Furthermore, the contribution of these individuals to the cultural and social fabric of rural and regional communities in which they reside is significant.

Despite this, skilled migrants must undertake lengthy, uncertain, expensive and ever-changing visa application processes. Currently processing is estimated to take at least 19 months for 50% of applicants under subclass 491- Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa. Variations between rules in place for Queensland and New South Wales has further complicated these issues as our business crosses state boundaries.

- 3. Community organisations in regional settlement locations have enhanced funding to offer training and employment opportunities to humanitarian entrants to Australia.**

In the regional re-settlement location of Armidale, we have employed two recent humanitarian entrants to Australia of Ezidi ethnicity. Their skills and lived experience has enabled our business to better service



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the Ezidi community within the town. This has supported access to mainstream services (such as health) rather than relying on 'refugee' health services.

The expansion of vocation education opportunities in Armidale for Ezidi people within the local TAFE has been positive for preparing recent arrivals for the Australian workforce and supporting their job applications, acting as a link between employers and TAFE students.

HealthWISE values a diverse workforce. Expanded funding to existing community organisations would increase the number of individuals who can access education and services and take up positions of employment within communities.

### **Summary**


HealthWISE thanks the Committee for their consideration of the contribution migrants make to nation building. HealthWISE appeals to the inquiry to meet reasonable regional Australian community expectations. A visa system that provides clarity and certainty in the pathway to residency for individuals, without policy changes impacting across their application period would have an immediate impact on the health and wellbeing of rural Australia.



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