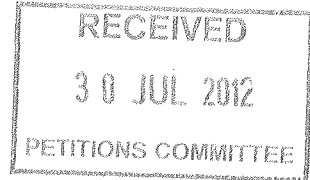




670-1078.



**The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Health**

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2012 regarding a petition requesting a hydrotherapy facility in the Tomaree Peninsula, New South Wales (Ref: 670/1078).

The Australian Government is committed to improving the delivery of health care in rural and remote communities by providing better access to infrastructure funding.

There are a number of programs within my Department which may be of interest to the petitioners.

The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP) is a competitive grants program which aims to improve access to health services by funding projects in rural and remote communities where a lack of infrastructure is a barrier to the establishment of new health services, or the enhancement of existing health services.

The Program provides up to a maximum of \$500,000 (GST exclusive) to eligible applicants seeking to provide services in the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas 2 to 5 with a population of up to 20,000.

Round six of the NRRHIP closed on 15 December 2011. The assessment process has been finalised and information on successful applicants is available at www.health.gov.au/nrrhip. Further information on the NRRHIP, including future funding rounds, is also available on this website.

A \$5 billion Health and Hospitals Fund (HHF) was established on 1 January 2009 under the *Nation-building Funds Act 2008* and forms part of the Government's broader nation-building infrastructure program. This investment delivers major improvements in health infrastructure through renewal and refurbishment of acute and primary care facilities, medical technology equipment and major medical research facilities and projects.

The Government provided funding for 85 health infrastructure projects valued at \$3.2 billion in the first two funding rounds of the HHF. These projects span three critical areas: the fight against cancer; translational research and research workforce infrastructure; and the improvement and modernisation of the hospital system.

The Government subsequently committed to a third HHF round focussed on regional health infrastructure, and funding of \$1.33 billion (GST exclusive) for 63 projects was confirmed as part of the 2011-12 Federal Budget. The aim of this round was to assist regional communities by providing upgrades to regional health infrastructure, expansions to regional hospitals and support for clinical training capacity in regional hospitals. The Government also announced further funding of \$475 million (GST exclusive) for another HHF regional priority round to open in 2011. Applications for the 2011 regional priority round closed on 19 October 2011 with funding of \$475 million (GST exclusive) for 76 projects announced in May 2012.

Further HHF funding round arrangements have yet to be determined. Further information about future rounds will be available at www.health.gov.au/hhf.

In addition, the Day Therapy Centre (DTC) program provides for therapy services to both frail older people living in the community, and to low level care residents of Commonwealth funded residential aged care facilities.

DTC clients receive a wide range of therapy services such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and podiatry, which all aim to optimise their independence to allow them to remain in the community, or in low level residential care, for as long as possible.

There are over 140 centres across Australia, and program funding for 2011-12 is \$37,626,782 (GST exclusive). On 24 February 2012, I announced a three year funding extension of existing providers until 30 June 2015. The extension will provide over \$117 million (GST exclusive) in funding over three years.

The Australian Government recognises the need for fundamental reform of the aged care system in order to ensure that it continues to provide high quality care and can respond to future challenges. Information on the comprehensive reform package can be found on the 'Living Longer. Living Better.' website at www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au.

As part of the Living Longer. Living Better. aged care reform, the Commonwealth Home and Community Care program, the National Respite for Carers Program, Day Therapy Centres and the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged Program will be consolidated under a new Home Support program from 1 July 2015. The Home Support program will have a focus on prevention and re-ablement as the first level of care in an end-to-end aged care system. The Government will expand this program to meet increasing demand for support at home.

Currently there is no funding available for the establishment of new Day Therapy Centres.

Further information is available at www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-commcare-dayther.htm-copy5.

Once again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Plibersek

14.7.12

