



Council of Social Service of New South Wales

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Mr Peter Garling SC
C/o The Executive Officer
Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals
PO Box A4
Sydney South NSW 1235

Dear Mr Garling

NCOSS is writing to express its concern over the manner in which public hearings for the Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW are being undertaken.

Firstly, we are concerned that the geographic distribution of hearings does not allow for a public hearing in Western Sydney or the Far West, South West, North West, North Coast, South Coast or Riverina areas of NSW.

Secondly, we are concerned that all of the public consultations are being held on hospital grounds. Whilst this seems appropriate given the Terms of Reference of the Special Commission, we are concerned that this may deter members of the community and consumers from engaging with the Commission through the public hearings. NCOSS recommends that additional public hearings are held off NSW Health premises, preferably in a community setting, to facilitate better engagement with members of the public in the public hearings.

Thirdly, we are concerned with the lack of clarity provided on the venue for public hearings. The website of the Special Commission indicates that "Details of the venues for those hearings will be placed on the Inquiry's website in the near future", yet we note that the public hearings have commenced and no such advice is available. Furthermore, NCOSS has been contacted by individuals who have sought this advice from the Commission and have been refused information.

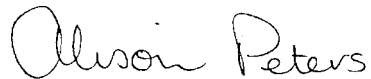
We are alarmed that the confluence of these three factors combines to discourage, if not impede, the involvement of consumers and members of the community in providing evidence to the Commission through the public hearings.

NCOSS believes it is essential that the community and consumers are given adequate opportunity to fully engage with the Commission. NCOSS believes this is essential in order for the committee to fully report on the Terms of Reference, and, in the long run, for a quality hospital system that meets the needs of the community. As part of NCOSS' commitment to open communication and keeping the community sector informed, a copy of this letter will be made available through the NCOSS website : www.ncoss.org.au

We encourage the Commission to take steps to ensure all members of the NSW community have the potential to participate in the Public Hearings. As per our previous communication, we are happy to assist as appropriate with this process.

If you would like to discuss this matter further please contact either myself or Kristie Brown, Senior Policy Officer, Health on 02 9211 2599, ext 130 or kristie@ncoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alison Peters".

Alison Peters
Director

13 March 2008