



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Rural and Regional Health Services**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 20 June 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 20 June 2012  
**Page** 7333  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Cobb, John, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr JOHN COBB** (Calare) (09:30): I rise to speak about a crisis in my electorate of Calare and indeed in the greater part of regional Australia. While the carbon tax is certainly a major crisis,—in fact it is already hitting our region hard—I wish to speak about another issue of enormous importance and one which has very serious consequences for the livelihoods of the people of Calare, and that is the rural doctor shortage. I have been involved in this issue for a long time. We got the Area of Need scheme when I was in agripolitics quite a lot of years ago. I have to give credit to the former minister for health in New South Wales Craig Knowles, who had a lot to do with making that happen.

Yesterday I met with the Mayor of Bathurst Regional Council, Councillor Greg Westman, and the GM, David Sherley, to discuss the GP shortage in Bathurst. They came to discuss in particular the campaign of a local GP clinic, Loxley House, to have Bathurst considered a district of workforce shortage—which is similar to the Area of Need scheme—to have Bathurst classified as a region with a shortage of doctors so they can qualify for government assistance in attracting doctors to move to Bathurst to fill impending vacancies in their clinic.

I was stunned to learn of the problems that Bathurst is having with getting doctors, because this is a town of 40,000-odd people, 2½ hours from Sydney. Loxley House clinic has spent four years advertising within the Rural Doctors Network without success, and there currently is another practice in Bathurst also advertising without success. What chance have the smaller towns further west got when a town like Bathurst is unable to attract doctors over that time?

According to recent census data, Bathurst has a population of almost 40,000 people, with an ageing population—in other words, residents over 65 years of age—making up 12.7 per cent. According to the Central West Division of General Practice, Bathurst currently has 33 full-time or part-time GPs, or 22½ full-time equivalent, and a GP-population ratio of one doctor to every 1,743 people. Looking at the map of the areas considered for a district of workforce shortage—a shortage of doctors—most of my electorate falls into the 'yes' category, except for the local government areas of Orange and Bathurst. With Orange, which is probably the only other serious medical area west of Sydney, you can understand it, but Bathurst has almost 40,000 people and has been unable to get a doctor in four years. That is pretty terrifying. I will be talking to the Minister for Health. This is something that must be resolved, and Bathurst needs to come under that scheme.