



**Jason Wood MP**  
Federal Member for La Trobe

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Emerald GP Visits Canberra to Discuss Local Doctor Shortages

Emerald Medical Centre (EMC) principal GP, Dr George Somers travelled to Canberra yesterday to discuss the doctor shortage in Emerald with Senator Fiona Nash MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Jason Wood MP, Federal Member for La Trobe. The meeting held in Parliament House covered the current restrictions on the recruitment of doctors to Emerald.

"I am very grateful to Mr Jason Wood MP, Federal Member for La Trobe for organising the meeting and for his ongoing support for the health needs of the people of the Emerald district," said Dr Somers.

In order to be eligible to recruit overseas trained doctors (OTDs), Emerald needs to be classified as an Area of Doctor Workforce Shortage (DWS) by the Department for Health. Such a classification is based on the doctor-patient ratio for the whole Shire. Cardinia Shire is not currently classed as DWS, however just a few kilometres north in The Shire of Yarra Ranges, the DWS classification applies.

"While 15% of EMC patients live in the southern part of Yarra Ranges Shire, the majority live in the northern part of Ranges Ward of Cardinia. This area is geographically separated from the Cardinia growth corridor, 20kms south, and is much more like the Yarra Ranges. Access to doctors should not be denied to the practices in the northern part of Ranges Ward," said Dr Somers.

The difficulty in classifying Emerald as DWS comes from large numbers of medical facilities and doctors in more densely populated suburbs of Cardinia Shire such as Pakenham, which skews data.

"I fully support Dr Somers. He's doing a magnificent job servicing our local area. The frustration with the bureaucracy of the Department of Health in Canberra is that it's not being flexible enough to have a common-sense approach to this problem,"

"In the past I pushed to get Emerald classified as DWS under the Howard Government, but given the changes in Governments, this classification wasn't maintained. Even with a population of 15,000 people, the nearest hospital is over 20kms of dangerous roads away. Local graduates aren't willing to make the journey out to Emerald, so we need to find an alternate solution - again," said Mr Wood.

Five of the eight doctors at EMC are OTDs recruited at those times and have stayed on. Despite heavy advertising EMC has found it difficult to attract local graduates.

"As we are separated from hospital and specialist support, our practice is more akin a rural practice than a metropolitan practice. We have extensive resuscitation equipment, because our critical patients need to be stabilised at EMC prior to transfer to the distant hospitals in Dandenong, Ferntree Gully or Berwick.

"EMC is the only practice within 15km that provides nightly after hours services. We would dearly love to expand our services from 60 to 80 hours per week (including Saturday afternoons and Sundays), but do not have access to the necessary doctors.

"Our one female GP is currently away on long service leave. Although we have interest from several female OTDs, we cannot recruit them due to the restrictions.

"We currently teach GP registrars, medical students, nursing students and GP admin staff. We would love to expand our teaching, but have difficulty keeping our heads above the clinical workload waters.

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"Senator Nash was very sympathetic to our plight in the Hills. The Minister advised that while the system is not ideal, and is under review, neither she nor the Minister for Health, Peter Dutton, currently has the power to make exceptions," said Dr Somers.

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