

**Northern NSW
Local Health District**

Office of the Chief Executive



8 May 2024

Councillor Chris Cherry
Tweed Shire Council
PO Box 816
Murwillumbah NSW 2484

Dear Mayor Cherry

Re: Murwillumbah Hospital

Thank you for your letter of April 8, 2024, regarding the closure of the surgical ward at Murwillumbah District Hospital [MDH]. It is important we have an open and frank dialogue on this and other matters in which the Tweed Shire Council may have an interest.

You ask in your letter for an undertaking from the NNSWLHD that the NNSWLHD/Ministry of Health will retain a '... highly functioning hospital in perpetuity...' Whilst the Board can assure you that the right level of health services [as determined by need and a sustainable and efficient service delivery model] for the Murwillumbah community will be provided by the NNSWLHD, it is not able to provide an undertaking that a highly functioning hospital will remain 'in perpetuity'. No health system could make such an undertaking as models of care are rapidly changing and what is deemed appropriate in 2024 may not be the right service delivery setting in the future. Having said that we can assure you at this time there are no current plans to close MDH.

Healthcare must continuously respond and evolve to meet the changing demands placed upon it by a range of factors including but not limited to social determinants of health, disease patterns, technological and pharmaceutical advancements, workforce availability and other challenges that emerge. This is a good thing. This means that to ensure we are always putting the patient first, which we must always do, we will have to change the way we deliver services from time to time.

Increasingly care is and will be delivered in the home, and time in hospital, when required, will be shorter. Examples were provided to your Council regarding day surgery procedures but there are many such examples. Another is the virtual ward model where care is already provided in people's homes and delivered by a mix of virtual medical assessment and community nursing visits. I stress that we are referring to all the services we deliver across our district and not specifically about MDH.

In reference to our commitment to '...provide the community with input into the further medical use of the unused capacity in the inpatient surgical ward....'. If by this you mean, consultations on the use to which any space available because of the closure of the inpatient surgical ward will be put, then, yes, we can provide assurance that consultation will continue to occur in line with clinical service planning. This will be done through the relevant established NNSWLHD

community group(s) and direct with you as Mayor.

Thank you once more for your letter and, of course we are both available to discuss this, and other matters with you should you wish.

Sincerely,



Tracey Maisey
Chief Executive
Northern NSW Health District



Peter Carter
Board Chair
Northern NSW Local Health District Board