

ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

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STATE GOVERNMENT TARGETS VITAL BUSH CLINIC

Katter's Australian Party Leader and Member for Traeger Robbie Katter is backing community objection to the possible roll-back of services at western Queensland's McKinlay Bush Nurse Clinic, the latest potential victim in a growing decline of vital rural health services.

In response to constituent complaints, Mr Katter's office confirmed that North West Hospital and Health Service was considering service changes at McKinlay, plus several other sites, following "continuing stressors" of the COVID-19 pandemic with recruiting and retaining staff and service delivery.

It could remove the town's beloved bush nurse and force sick McKinlay and Kynuna residents to travel at least 100km to receive care in Julia Creek.

Mr Katter said COVID or no COVID, the attack on bush services was wrong.

He said he had deep concerns that doctor and nursing staff shortages were looming for rural and regional locations, and said he would not accept those who live outside of metropolitan areas being treated like "poor cousins".

"This clinic has been running for close to 100 years and this is the second time in about a decade that locals have had to fight to save their precious service from closure; it's abhorrent that the Government has once again put it in the crosshairs," Mr Katter said.

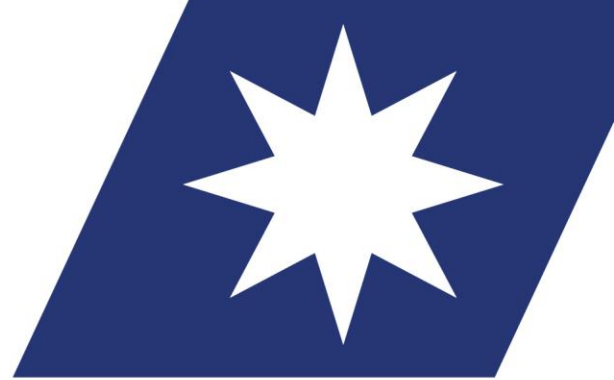
"McKinlay's Bush Nurse Clinic provides health checks and education, home visits, pharmacy, and nursing and emergency care; these are the most basic forms of health care and it is not a luxury to expect them to be available – would the Brisbane-based parties consider removing these services in south-east Queensland?"

While the Department of Health said the discussions were at a preliminary stage and local staff and residents would be kept engaged and notified, locals said a lack of communication had left them shocked and angry.

They said news of the potential closure came as a complete shock and would prove disastrous, leaving residents without medical care when heavy rain or wind events often prevented outside emergency and RFDS services from entering McKinlay.

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The constituents also complained that the closure was being discussed despite assurances that it would remain open after Queensland Health took it over from the Bush Nurse Association.

One patient said the bush nurse made weekly visits to many people who lived alone on stations and removing those visits would have significant impacts on mental wellbeing and leave vulnerable people forgotten.

The attack on McKinlay's health services follows an alarming staff shortage at Hughenden Health Service which left the community without a doctor for the last week of 2020, and the downgrading of the Julia Creek Hospital, which sparked community outrage.

A dire shortage of medical staff had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and facilities were left desperately trying to find replacements.

Mr Katter said it was unacceptable but every effort was being made to ensure the situation was handled as well as possible and a commitment was made to find better ways to support these rural areas.

—ENDS—

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