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**Parliament House – Opening Speech**

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**Inquiry – The implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to workforce issues, workplace culture and funding considerations for remote, rural and regional health.**

I speak here today on behalf of Can Assist's 3,000 plus volunteer members across country NSW.

Whilst we do not work in the NSW health system, and do not claim to be experts on it, we do work closely alongside it - sourcing our clients and distributing assistance. The feedback we share today is sourced from conversations we have had over the last 6-8 months with health care professionals and our members across all rural local health districts.

There are various issues raised in our submission – I would like to highlight here that the bonus scheme is not working as well as it could be; There are hospitals in dire need of staff that have either had multiple bonus applications rejected or who have simply just not applied. Other workplaces have actually voted against using them altogether. There is much confusion around the finer detail and in some cases the scheme has alienated the very workers it is designed to retain.

Additionally, whilst not raised in our submission but relevant to the terms of reference under recommendation one we would like to raise two further issues:

**First - Travel and accommodation rebates for isolated rural patients**

In line with the recommendations of the 2021 Inquiry, IPTAAS reforms have been rolled out swiftly and are creating better patient outcomes. Across our client base and across our branches more and more people are availing themselves of IPTAAS – and in some cases no longer require the support of Can Assist.

However, whilst an important part of getting isolated patients to treatment, community transport has been left out of the reform process. Patients who use it are ineligible for IPTAAS. In opposition to the philosophy of IPTAAS, passengers travelling for non-emergency treatment via community transport are subsidized less per kilometer the longer they need to travel and charged the same rate as a passenger travelling for a shopping trip.

Further, with the Cancer Council NSW now consistently applying their eligibility criteria for their much-needed travel to treatment service, Can Assist has been receiving a higher rate of referrals from patients unable to find or afford transport to treatment. We are now funding an increasing number of community transport trips. Reform of this sector is needed more than ever.

**Secondly - Radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy is uniquely expensive for patients not living close to treatment. Cancer patients travelling daily from Bega to Canberra (460km return) for example would face a charge of up to \$1800 a week in Community Transport fees to access it.

Since the 2021 health inquiry – the State Government has utilized two more of the Federal Government grants that have been on offer since 2019 to build much needed radiotherapy services in Tweed Heads and Nambucca. Two sizeable grants for Armidale and Eurobodalla remain left on the table.

These communities have been promised these services and they need them. We cannot tolerate a society where equitable access to life saving treatment is determined by your place of residence. Should the State Government choose not to build these services they must remain open to working with the private sector to do so, as they have recently done in Griffith and routinely do in metro areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts.

