



The Hon Ryan Park MP
Minister for Health and
Minister for Regional Health
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

Gummun Place Aged Care Hostel, Merriwa

Dear Ryan

The Merriwa District Progress Association (MDPA) would like to ask for your assistance to help secure the future of Gummun Place Aged Care Hostel in Merriwa NSW. The Upper Hunter Shire Council (Council), who currently operate the facility, has begun a transition process to hand the operation of the hostel to another provider, or alternatively to close the doors permanently if another provider cannot be found.

The community of the Merriwa district is appalled by Council's decision, as Gummun Place is recognised as a vital service for the district's ageing community.

We are aware that the closure of Gummun Place or even its downgrading to a low care facility or hostel would impact medical services at a State level, placing greater demand on those services. Therefore, we wish to make you and your Department aware of this matter and ask for your advice and assistance in securing an acceptable outcome for the sixteen residents of Gummun Place, its future residents and the local community in general.

History

In the early 1990's, the community raised enough funds and applied for grants to establish Gummun Place as a hostel for the aged residents in the district who were unable to care for themselves at home but were not unwell enough to require hospitalisation. A local businessman donated the land on which Gummun Place now sits. Consequently, the community holds the existence of Gummun Place close to their heart. A Trust was set up to manage the facility, and the (then) Merriwa Shire Council appointed as Trustee. Upon Councils' amalgamation in 2004, the Trusteeship was transferred to the Upper Hunter Shire Council to manage and operate Gummun Place.

To the blind satisfaction of the local community, Council managed Gummun Place effectively and efficiently until 2019, when it declared its intention to devolve itself of Gummun Place. The violent objections raised by the community and the lodgement of a 600 signature petition to preserve Gummun Place, caused the Council to halt its path down this course of action. However, on occasions since that time, Council has held confidential meetings to discuss the future of Gummun Place, and has kept the community in the dark about their discussions.

Current situation

In November 2024, Council announced its intention to advertise for authorised aged care providers to take over Gummun Place, either by management, lease, or purchase of the facility. The MDPA called a public meeting, which was extremely well attended by concerned residents, and at which the community expressed its outrage that Council would consider closing Gummun Place.

Council engaged a consultant (Pride Aged Living) to seek expressions of interest (EOI) from authorised aged care providers, however no firm expressions of interest were received.

On analysing Council's financial statements on income and expenditure, it has been found that the cost of operating Gummun Place has increased significantly over the past four years.

MERRIWA DISTRICT PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

In a public information session arranged by Council's new Gummun Place Hostel Advisory Committee, Council advised that it has applied to the Department of Health and Aged Care (in 2023, 2024 and 2025) for a grant of \$2,000,000 to carry out essential works on Gummun Place so that it meets the standards required of an aged care hostel.

It is not surprising that there were no expressions of interest from authorised aged care providers to take over a facility when, by Council's own admission, it requires \$2 million of repairs and upgrades and is costing an increasing amount to operate.

The reality is that aged care in MMM5 rural communities - like healthcare - requires genuine whole-of-government support. There is an urgent need for innovative and collaborative solutions that make the best use of our limited resources and deliver effective, long-term outcomes.

Gummun Place is a crucial piece in the delicate jigsaw of rural health. Closing it would have immediate and costly repercussions for the State health system - increased ambulance transfers, greater pressure on hospitals, and elderly patients with relatively minor needs occupying acute care beds.

On top of this, Merriwa is already in crisis when it comes to in-home care. Waiting times for My Aged Care packages are close to twelve months, and one aged care provider has recently ceased servicing clients in Merriwa altogether.

The situation is unsustainable, and the community needs leadership and partnership across all levels of government to resolve this critical situation.

Rural residents have the right to age in their own home town.

So, we are asking for your assistance in resolving the issue of aged care in Merriwa, and securing an appropriate future for Gummun Place.

We would also be pleased if you would discourage Council from dispassionately disposing of this essential facility in a 'fire sale' to a private organisation.

Naturally, we would be grateful for any other influence you could exert on appropriate parties to secure the future operation of Gummun Place.

The long-term future of Gummun Place is of the highest importance to the community of Merriwa and district, so we are seeking assistance and compassion in our attempts to secure this essential facility for our local ageing population.

Yours faithfully,



Stephen Gowlland
President

Wednesday, 20 August 2025