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18th November 2024

Mr Matthew Irvine
Chairperson
Western NSW Local Health District Health Board,

Dear Mr Irvine,

We the undersigned are medical practitioners who work for the Virtual Rural Generalist Service (VRGS). Doctors work at the front line of providing health services to rural members of our Local Health District. We write this letter in response to the ABC News article detailing the deliberate restriction of access to surgical abortions and abortion care at Orange Health Service in the Western New South Wales Local Health District (WNSWLHD). Access to abortion care is a legal right for all NSW women and must be fully accessible to all women in NSW. The allegations that health executives at Orange Health Service individually implicated themselves in restricting abortion services are shocking and unacceptable.

The fight to decriminalise abortion has been a long and painful journey for many women in NSW, and generations of women have fought to make abortion what it should be in NSW; legal, safe and accessible by all women in the state.

The allegation that key leaders within the health executive may have deliberately restricted access to surgical terminations is deeply concerning. Intervention to restrict legal health care at this level is a clear violation of the employee code of conduct.

As of yet no formal inquiry has been announced into the identity of these senior officials, nor the source of the verbal orders to healthcare staff or the document that directed clinicians to cease providing full and timely access to abortion and family planning procedures at Orange Health Service. This is an egregious overreach of state health executive powers and demonstrates a deliberate lack of respect and care for the local community as well as staff of the WNSWLHD.

Rural women already face significant barriers to accessing abortion care in NSW, and the fact that a rural hospital such as Orange Health Service is participating in further restriction of services is a slap in the face to all rural women living in the LHD.

As healthcare providers working the WNSWLHD we are both heartbroken and incensed by these reports. We expect and demand action from the WNSWLHD Board to ensure those at Orange Health Service who have sought to impair access to health for rural women in this district are held accountable for their actions. We have submitted this letter to the Independent Commission Against Corruption as well as the HCCC. We

ask that any health executives found to have participated in decisions that restricted access to abortion services be removed from their executive position and referred to AHPRA or the Public Service Commissioner.

We await your response on this matter so we as front line medical staff can be reassured that the WNSWLHD is a safe space for women seeking abortion care and will continue to advocate for the women of the WNSWLHD.

Kind regards,

