

# Locals face bitter pill

By Joni Scanlon

PAT Bourke made Hackett her home 46 years ago, when the suburb was thriving with a pharmacy and doctor at the local shops.

Now in her 70s, the long-term resident is imploring the federal government to support a grass roots push to bring a pharmacy back to the suburb.

Hackett is unable to qualify for a pharmacy under a Federal Government Pharmacy Agreement, which rules that a pharmacy cannot open within 1.5 kilometres of another pharmacy. The nearest pharmacy to the proposed Hackett site is 1.345 kilometres away in Watson.

Mrs Bourke knows from personal experience how important a pharmacy can be; she has been a carer for at least the past four years to her husband.

A veteran of World War II, Mrs Bourke's husband was dying and needed a variety of medications to ease his pain. His lungs were destroyed from working in a concrete factory they took over in France during the war, and he had developed skin cancers.

While he was in and out of Canberra hospitals, it was their wish he would be able to stay at home, rather than move to a nursing home. He passed away about two months ago at the age of 92.

Mrs Bourke wrote to Federal Minister for Health and Ageing Tanya Plibersek in June about her circumstances and the need for a pharmacy in Hackett.

"The government is pushing for older persons to stay in their own homes if possible instead of going into nursing homes," she wrote.

"My husband, who died a few weeks ago, and I received very welcome help to keep him at home. We had a community nurse visit regularly, carers twice a day, house cleaners, a doctor who would come to the house if needed, even a podiatrist would visit.

"But if I needed medication for him I have had to either take two buses to Watson to the nearest chemist, wait for the medication to be made, then two buses back. Thank goodness I can still drive."

Mrs Bourke says Minister Plibersek's decision to reject the Hackett Pharmacy is ridiculous when they have a pharmacist ready and willing to open one.

Federal Member for Fraser Andrew Leigh wrote to Minister Plibersek to support the application back in March. A spokeswoman for Dr Leigh said when the application was rejected, he wrote a further letter urging the



Hackett resident Pat Bourke wants a pharmacy to open at Hackett Shops.

Picture: Elesia Lee

Minister to use the discretion available to her to approve the pharmacy.

"I'm very sympathetic to the needs of Hackett residents like Ms Bourke," he said.

"Those with the greatest need for a pharmacy will benefit the most from having a local option. Parents of young children, as well as the elderly, will have easier access to important services.

"A local pharmacy will mean only a short journey, rather than bundling sick kids into the car to head to Dickson or Watson, or navigating bus routes."

Mrs Bourke said with so many new facilities in the area, including Blue Gum School, a men's shelter and an aged care centre, there was an even greater case to approve a pharmacy.

"It seems absurd that a whole

suburb is asking for this most basic of necessities – a chemist – in their shopping area when it is surrounded by a school, child care centre, a preschool, many offices, a men's shelter, aged person's units, plus the residents of Hackett," she said.

"Things should change; if situations change you go with it."

Ms Plibersek was unavailable to comment.