

CHRONICLE MAY 29, 2012

Pharmacy needs denied



Minister won't bend rules

By Jori Scanlon

HACKETT residents are concerned a decision to deny them a pharmacy will limit their access to medication and health advice.

Health and Aging Minister Tanya Plibersek declined to approve an application for the pharmacy at Hackett.

Owners of the Griffith Pharmacy, Rhonda Warne and Yuko Rainoto, had leased a shop in Hackett for a pharmacy, but the minister's decision not to exercise her discretionary powers has left them stranded.

Hackett is unable to qualify for a pharmacy under a Federal Government Pharmacy Agreement. Location rules prevent a pharmacy opening within 1.5 kilometres of another pharmacy.

Pharmacist Rhonda Warne said the nearest pharmacy to the proposed Hackett site was 1.345 kilometres away in Watson, just 155 metres short of the cut-off. She said if the shopping centre was just one block over there would be no issue.

"We went to the minister to ask for her discretion because of the location rules and the way the shopping centres are set up in Canberra, and the fact that there is no direct public transport to the nearest pharmacy, which is in Watson, but they don't seem to care," she said.

The letter from Ms Plibersek's office said the minister had declined to exercise her discretion, but no reasons were given.

"I'm entitled to write to the department, which I am doing,

asking for a statement of reasons," Ms Warne said.

Ms Warne was shocked by the minister's decision not to allow a pharmacy, especially after the support she received from residents and territory and federal politicians.

Federal Member for Fraser Andrew Leigh said he was sorry to hear the Minister for Health wasn't able to approve the Hackett pharmacy.

"I personally wrote to ask her to approve it, on the basis that there isn't a bus service between Watson and Hackett, and because the significant population growth in Watson and North Watson will create enough business to support both a Watson and a Hackett pharmacy," Dr Leigh said.

"Unfortunately, the rules are not particularly flexible - they only look at the straight-line distance from the nearest pharmacy - and there's a reluctance to make exceptions. I will continue to support a pharmacy in Hackett."

When Ms Warne contacted Pharmacy Location Rules director Tony Wynd she was told the reason for the decision was it was reasonable for the people of Hackett to use the surrounding pharmacies in Watson, Ainslie and Dickson. Mr Wynd was unavailable to comment.

Ms Warne is concerned that a third of residents in the area are aged over 54 and may be suffering chronic illnesses that limit their ability to use public transport.

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Rhonda Warne, right, can not open a pharmacy in Hackett. Local residents Greg Haughey, left, Marian Williams, James Walker, Lorraine Mason and Max Huntington are unhappy about the decision. Picture: Elesa Lee