

Media Release

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Sheed calls for government support of regional universities

Independent Member for the Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed has called on both the Victorian State and Federal Governments to support regional university campuses impacted by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

“In discussions with university leadership, I have been staggered to learn how dire the financial position of these vital institutions has become due to the current crisis,” Ms Sheed said.

“They have reportedly lost hundreds of millions of dollars from their annual budgets and are facing critical funding decisions. We cannot allow this situation to damage the extremely important task of training and educating high-skilled workers in regions such as my electorate.”

Many years of careful planning and work to provide first-class tertiary education pathways in Victoria’s regions is being placed at risk, according to Ms Sheed.

“We’ve long known we have difficulty retaining professionals in the regions and we also know one of the best ways to attract and keep professionals, such as health workers, paramedics, social workers, doctors, nurses and teachers, is to train them here. They come from our community or become part of the community and they stay,” Ms Sheed said.

“La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne both offer education and training in Shepparton and both have created a fantastic program where young people in my electorate can study medicine locally and receive their full qualifications, going on to work at GV Health if they wish. We know this system is working. I would be devastated to see such a program and others like it put at risk by this sudden funding crisis.”

Universities are not eligible for the Federal Government’s Jobkeeper program. Without Jobkeeper one university alone with links to the Shepparton region will face the loss of 600 to 800 jobs or up to a quarter of all staff across its entire organisation, according to information supplied to Ms Sheed.

“Across the entire sector, a loss of more than 20 per cent of staff will severely impact the ability of our tertiary institutions to deliver quality teaching and training in both the metropolitan and regional areas but I expect the regions will be particularly hard hit considering their smaller campus sizes and lower resistance to cuts,” Ms Sheed said.

“The Independent Federal Member for Indi Helen Haines has been demanding the Federal Government extend Jobkeeper to universities and I strongly lend my support to her position.

“I will also be investigating how the Victorian State Government can get behind regional campuses. We cannot allow the Coronavirus Pandemic to destroy the ability of regional Victorians to train for high-skilled positions in their own communities allowing them to go on to contribute to the social and economic health of those communities. It is very clear that in the years ahead we will need a highly educated and skilled workforce to deal with the human and economic fallout of this pandemic.”

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