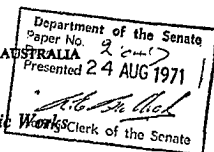


1971

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA



Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

FINAL REPORT

relating to the proposed redevelopment of

ALICE SPRINGS HOSPITAL

Northern Territory

(SEVENTH REPORT OF 1971)

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C O N T E N T S

	<u>Paragraph</u>
The Reference	1
The Interim Report	5
The Deferred Enquiry	10
Department of Works' Study	13
General Conclusions	17
Medical Officers' Quarters	19
Nurses' Accommodation	
Existing Arrangements	20
The Alternatives	22
Results of Study	24
Availability of Land	26
Tariff	29
Committee's Recommendations	32
Design and Construction of Bedsitter Units	
Layout	33
Structure	35
Finishes and Fittings	36
Electrical Services	38
Mechanical Services	41
Fire Protection	42
Other Engineering Services	43
Other Matters	
Ancillary Accommodation	45
Swimming Pool	46
Programme	49
Estimate of Cost	50
Recommendations and Conclusions	52

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

REDEVELOPMENT OF ALICE SPRINGS HOSPITAL
NORTHERN TERRITORY

FINAL REPORT

On 24 December 1970, His Excellency the Governor-General in Council referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament the proposal for redevelopment of the hospital at Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

The Committee's interim report on this reference was tabled in the House of Representatives and in the Senate on 22 April 1971. The Committee now have the honour to present the final report.

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee included the construction of new buildings and remodelling of some existing buildings at the hospital at Alice Springs to accommodate 313 in-patients and to provide ancillary services and domestic accommodation for staff.
2. The new buildings proposed were
 - a three-storey ward block to accommodate 253 patients and supporting hospital facilities;
 - a services building for stores, laundry, boiler and chiller house and the mortuary;
 - a three-storey nurses' home to accommodate 212 sisters.

3. Other phases of the work included

- alterations to the existing nurses' quarters;
- extension of the single medical officers' quarters;
- remodelling the central sterile supply and theatre block to provide a public health laboratory;
- remodelling two existing ward blocks to take 20 and 40 patients respectively;
- remodelling the administrative building for a regional office for the Department of Health; and
- conversion of laboratory buildings and the aerial medical services building for staff accommodation.

4. The estimated cost of the work as referred to the Committee was \$11.5 million.

THE INTERIM REPORT

5. The following is an extract from paragraphs 7 to 10 inclusive of the Committee's interim report.

"7. As part of our investigation we also examined the cost of providing comparable living-in accommodation in a number of projects currently being examined by the Committee including the present reference, the Community College, Darwin and quarters for the Services. A preliminary examination suggested that there are anomalies in the standards adopted by various Commonwealth authorities charged with providing residential accommodation and that an overall study might usefully be made of relative costs and standards.

8. Consequently, we have asked the Department of Works, as the Commonwealth's design authority, to undertake an analysis of the various implications of different types of living-in accommodation. This study is now in hand but may not be completed and considered by the Committee for several months.

9. As we are anxious not to delay this project, we are therefore making this interim report so that the Government can approach the Parliament for an early endorsement of the proposed work but without the living-in accommodation for nurses and single medical officers.

10. Briefly then, the Committee

- concluded that a need has been established for all of the work in the reference including residential accommodation for nurses and single medical officers;
- concur in the work proceeding except for that accommodation; and
- undertake to report finally on the design and construction of the nurses' and single medical officers' accommodation when the Department of Works' analysis has been considered. "

6. The Committee in paragraphs 42 to 44 inclusive went on to describe the proposed nurses' and medical officers' residential accommodation in the following way.

"42. Nurses' Home The work referred to the Committee allows for the existing brick two-storey nurses' quarters to be reconditioned and extended. As remodelled, the building will provide bedroom accommodation for 68 nurses, as well as the kitchen, dining room and lounge facilities for all nursing staff resident at the hospital.

43. A new accommodation block providing quarters for a further 212 sisters is proposed to be built as part of this reference east of and adjoining the existing block. The proposal submitted to the Committee provides for all nurses' accommodation to be air conditioned.

44. Medical Officers' Quarters An existing accommodation block provides quarters for eight single medical officers. The proposal is to extend this building to provide a further eight units of evaporatively cooled accommodation. "

7. The proposed additional nurses' home accommodation contains single bedrooms of about 120 sq. ft each with a built-in wardrobe and dressing table/ vanity basin unit. Each floor of the nurses' home has communal toilet, bath and shower facilities, a lounge room and a boxroom. The proposed building is to be air conditioned and have three wings each with three floors, each floor accommodating upwards of 25 bedrooms.

8. The medical officers' accommodation consists of a block of eight 300 sq ft bedsitting room units, each containing a small bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin as well as a wardrobe and cupboards. The block also provides a small kitchen/pantry, dining room and laundry facilities. The extension would double the bedsitter accommodation and provide a lounge to be shared by the occupants of the new and existing quarters. The new accommodation, as with the existing, is to be evaporatively cooled.

9. The relevant recommendation of the Committee stated in paragraph 78 -

"Except for the residential accommodation for nuses and single medical officers, the Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference. "

THE DEFERRED ENQUIRY

10. The Committee's decision to defer detailed consideration of the nurses' and medical officers' accommodation arose primarily from dissatisfaction expressed by a number of nursing sisters from the Alice Springs Hospital with accommodation arrangements in the nurses' home. The suggestion was that living in an institutionalised environment was not their ideal and that a section of the nursing staff had a strong preference to live out as part of the general community.

11. The evidence given by sisters at the public hearing came at about the same time as the Committee were examining bedsitter accommodation for students at the Community College, Darwin which was costing less per place than the nurses' home at Alice Springs. As the type of accommodation in the Community College proposal was thought to be similar to that in the minds of the nurses who did not favour hostel living, it was evident that the matter deserved much closer study in the context of the Commonwealth providing the bedsitter accommodation sought by the Alice Springs nurses.

12. As accommodation for single medical officers at the hospital was also being augmented, it seemed appropriate to defer a conclusion on whether this accommodation also was appropriate and economical.

13. Department of Works' Study At the Committee's request, the Department of Works carried out a comprehensive study of the costs and standards of living quarters being provided by the Commonwealth in a number of different establishments including accommodation at

- the Alice Springs Hospital;
- R.A.A.F. Chester Hill, H.M.A.S. Cerberus and at the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey;

- Commonwealth Hostel, Alice Springs for both salaried officers and industrial workers;
- the Springvale Migrant Hostel;
- the Community College, Darwin;
- Yirara College, Alice Springs for Aboriginal students; and
- the Rehabilitation Centre, Glen Waverley, Victoria for visitors.

14. The study also included for comparison purposes recently built motel style facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin as well as a number of alternative styles of bedsitter and single flat units constructed in free standing blocks and in a village complex.

15. The documents produced by the Department as a result of the study were examined prior to a presentation and discussion of them at a meeting of the Committee in Melbourne on 11 June 1971. After that discussion, the public hearing on the Alice Springs Hospital redevelopment was resumed and living-in accommodation of all types covered by the study was discussed. The Committee also took further evidence from representatives of the Department of Health.

16. The resumed public hearing and the debate at the private meeting of the Committee which followed, permitted the Committee to reach the conclusions which this report now discusses.

17. General Conclusions The Committee feel that the results of the study will be of considerable assistance and benefit to all Commonwealth authorities responsible for providing domestic accommodation as it certainly was to the Committee in reaching the final conclusions on the Alice Springs Hospital reference. Broadly, for example, it has shown that the conventional type of hostel accommodation is not necessarily the most economical method of

accommodating people, even if it is relatively easy to administer. The study then should be examined in the wider context of accommodation for Commonwealth Public Servants and others for whom the Commonwealth provides living accommodation, not only from the cost angle but also from the social point of view.

18. The Committee are conscious that in reaching conclusions on the Alice Springs Hospital accommodation the way is being opened for consideration in other departmental situations of similar bedsitter accommodation in lieu of the conventional hostel accommodation. We are also aware that not only is the unit type of accommodation widely thought to be superior and preferred by many Commonwealth employees but it is commonly thought to be significantly costlier to provide. From the Department of Works' study, the latter assumption appears to be wrongly based.

19. Medical Officers' Quarters The study showed that the type of accommodation proposed for single medical officers at the hospital is appropriate to the needs of the occupants and in the circumstances is economical. It is therefore recommended that the quarters for single medical officers as proposed by the Department of Health and Works be constructed at an estimated cost of \$120,000.

NURSES' ACCOMMODATION

20. Existing Arrangements Accommodation for sisters at the hospital is of the hostel type and is available to those who require it at a full board of \$9.50 per week. We noted that the actual cost to the hospital of providing this service is about \$22.00 per week so that the board of sisters who use it is subsidised by some \$12.50 per week.

21. It is not mandatory for sisters to live in and those who desire may live outside the precincts of the hospital, receiving under current approvals, a living-out allowance of \$2.50 per week. The Committee were told that whilst suitable private accommodation is difficult to obtain and is relatively dear, a proportion of single staff prefer to live out, notwithstanding the considerable financial disadvantage.

22. The Alternatives From the evidence given to the Committee, we concluded that although there will always be a proportion, maybe a majority, of nursing staff who will favour the present hostel type accommodation and arrangements, for various reasons including convenience and/or economy, there will always be some who will prefer to be more independent and live away from the hospital atmosphere in bedsitter, flat or private accommodation despite the financial disadvantages.

23. The factors which create the latter preference do not affect the efficiency of the hospital and we concluded that if suitable alternative accommodation can be built for the same or less cost than in the nurses' home, then there is good reason to provide it. The Committee believe that the existence of a variety of types of accommodation will assist recruitment of sisters and will induce valuable and experienced staff to remain when they may have been inclined to move on.

24. Results of Study The most important conclusion drawn from the study was that on a per person basis, it would cost \$6,665 to house a sister in the proposed nurses' home, and that for comparison purposes, for example, costs at the Community College are \$5,440 and \$7,660 for a salaried officer at the Commonwealth Hostel at Alice Springs. It also demonstrated that it is possible to build bedsitter and one and two-bedded flats from \$5,780 upwards depending on the grouping of the units and their quality.

25. Of the alternatives submitted by the Department of Works, the Committee favoured the bedsitter unit known as type B.2.2. This unit of about 180 sq ft overall dimensions, provides a bedsitting room containing a stove, sink and refrigerator with a set of shower, toilet and laundry facilities shared between each two units. On the basis of a block of 16 such units (8 units on each of two floors), the building cost per unit at Alice Springs is estimated at \$5,780. Apart from units designed for occupancy by more than one person and accommodation for senior N.C.O.s and females in the Services, this layout is comparable in cost with others examined and, significantly, \$900 per place cheaper than the proposed accommodation in the nurses' home. Furthermore, we feel that the design provides those features most sought by nurses who do not like hostel quarters.

26. Availability of Land We noted the evidence that there is insufficient land within the hospital grounds for the construction of domestic accommodation other than in the form of a nurses' home. It is understood, however, that sufficient land can be made available in Bradshaw Drive adjoining the railway reserve for a village complex of units. This site is about half a mile from the hospital.

27. It is considered that this land should be set aside for the complex referred to in the Committee's recommendations. In our view, it does not matter which department is responsible for the land but if it assists the Department of Health to fully subsidise the nurses who occupy the units, then the land should be regarded as being part of the hospital reserve.

28. The Committee considered closely the number of units to be provided and whether they should be built in small blocks dispersed throughout Alice Springs or whether a larger village complex might be more suitable.

On balance and as the acceptance of a new approach to the accommodation of nurses would be in the nature of an experiment, we feel that it would be appropriate to provide 50 to 60 of the places now required in bedsitter units, the final number to depend on the outcome of further design studies. We also consider that for these same reasons, for more efficient use of land and ease of management, a village complex would be the most suitable.

29. Tariff The existing financial arrangements for the payment of board and lodging are mentioned in paragraphs 20 and 21 above. These arrangements, whereby a substantial indirect subsidy is paid to nurses who live in and staff who choose to live out are disadvantaged, are apparently tied in with the hospital's financial arrangements.

30. It was suggested to the Committee that the continued application of these principles in the event of flats or bedsitter units being built by the Commonwealth outside the hospital reserve would require the payment by the occupants of a rental based on a percentage of salary plus local rates and charges. It is understandable that under these conditions the cost to the individual would probably be out of the range of most staff.

31. As we could find no satisfactory reason or explanation for the discriminatory treatment of staff who live out, we believe that steps should be taken, in calculating the cost to occupants of the bedsitter units, to introduce a similar subsidy to that enjoyed by staff who live at the nurses' home. If the only means of achieving this equality of treatment is to regard the new units as being located within the hospital reserve, then this should be done.

32. Committee's Recommendations The Committee recommend that

- the nurses' home as proposed be constructed but reduced to a capacity of 160/170 bedrooms;

- alterations and additions to the existing nurses' home estimated to cost \$310,000 proceed;
- about 50/60 bedsitter units be constructed as close to the hospital as possible;
- the conditions of occupancy of the bedsitter units by hospital staff fully recognise the subsidy arrangements applicable to staff accommodated in the nurses' home.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF BEDSITTER UNITS

33. Layout Under the Northern Territory Building Manual, the minimum size of room for a bedsitting room is 180 sq ft and for a bathroom 44 sq ft. The proposed B.2.2 type accommodation will observe these requirements.

Included in the bedsitting room is to be a curtained alcove containing a stainless steel sink and drainer, mini-range, refrigerator and cupboards. The bathroom, shared by two units, is to contain a toilet, shower, wash hand basin and a small washing machine. No built-in furniture is proposed.

34. A small building to accommodate a supervisor, clean and dirty linen store, gardener's store and plant is also proposed from which to service the complex.

35. Structure The blocks will be of two-storey construction and from local information it is not expected that the foundations will present any difficulties. Construction will be in load bearing brick with concrete ground and first floors. Roof trusses and timber purlins will support a galvanised metal deck roof. Patios and paths will be concrete.

36. Finishes and Fittings The external walls of all buildings will be in face brick and windows will be aluminium framed and the roof insulated.

Internal walls will also be face brick and hard plaster with vinyl tile surrounds to fittings. Floors will be covered with vinyl tiles.

37. Ceilings on the upper floor will be plaster board and on the lower floor, hard plaster.

38. Electrical Services Provision is made for a package type electrical substation and underground cabling for the distribution of electricity. Street lighting and telephone cabling to the buildings are included.

39. Illumination will comply with the S.A.A. lighting code and power points will be installed in each flat. Wall mounted strip electric heaters will be installed in each unit.

40. The supply to each flat is to be separately metered for the recovery of electricity costs.

41. Mechanical Services As it is more economical to provide comfort conditions in these units by air conditioning as opposed to evaporative cooling, a wall mounted air conditioner is to be installed in each bedroom. An exhaust fan is also proposed for each kitchen area. Hot water will be provided from roof mounted solar hot water units. A washing machine is to be installed in each bathroom.

42. Fire Protection The fire protection measures are to comprise manual push button alarms at each stairway and one warning bell for each block. The alarms will be connected to the local fire brigade alarm system. A water main for fire purposes will be connected to the town water supply and will service two hydrants on the site.

43. Other Engineering Services The scheme will include a bitumen sealed road within the site constructed with concrete kerbs. Car parking areas will be gravel surfaced.

44. Buildings will be connected to the town sewerage system and water will be supplied from adjacent town mains.

OTHER MATTERS

45. Ancillary Accommodation For the staff of the hospital who do not live on the premises, it is necessary to provide change room facilities at the hospital where they can change from their uniforms into street clothes. Such facilities will be required for the sisters occupying the bedsitter units and can be incorporated in the design of the new nurses' home as amended.

46. Swimming Pool Strong representations were made to the Committee by sisters and other witnesses for a swimming pool to be provided as a staff amenity at the hospital. The only swimming pool available to the public at Alice Springs is an unsatisfactory and inadequate pool, although the nurses are permitted, as a private concession, to use a small pool in a motel near the hospital.

47. We noted that in the case of the Darwin Hospital, the Committee reported in 1962

" The amenities available in Darwin to nurses in their leisure time are limited and we believe that a swimming pool in the hospital grounds would be a great attraction to staff and make them more contented. "

As a result of this recommendation, a swimming pool estimated to cost £20,000 was provided at the Darwin Hospital. For similar reasons, we recommend that swimming facilities should also be provided as a staff amenity at the Alice Springs Hospital.

48. The Department of Works provided supplementary evidence about the cost of providing swimming pools of various dimensions and types, with and without diving facilities. We have no strong preference for any one type but believe that the facilities to be provided should be decided after consultations between the Departments of Works and Health, the cost not to exceed \$65,000 and not to include diving facilities.

PROGRAMME

49. The preparation of working drawings and tender documents for the amended scheme is expected to be completed within the time targets set for the original concept. The same comment applies to the completion of construction.

ESTIMATE OF COST

50. The estimated cost of the work not reported on in the interim report was \$1,800,000, including alterations and additions to the existing nurses' quarters, the new single medical officers' quarters and the nurses' home. The present report endorses the first two items which are expected to cost \$310,000 and \$120,000 respectively.

51. An estimate has not been obtained of the cost of the other residential accommodation now recommended including the amended nurses' home scheme, the change room facilities, the complex of bedsitter units and the associated services building. However, it can be contained within the \$1,310,000 allowed for the new nurses' home in the original concept.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

52. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

Paragraph

1. THE QUARTERS FOR SINGLE MEDICAL OFFICERS AS PROPOSED BY
THE DEPARTMENTS OF HEALTH AND WORKS SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED,
AT AN ESTIMATED COST OF \$120,000.

Paragraph

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|----|--|----|
| 2. | THE NURSES' HOME AS PROPOSED SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED BUT REDUCED TO A CAPACITY OF 160/170 BEDROOMS. | 32 |
| 3. | ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EXISTING NURSES' HOME, ESTIMATED TO COST \$310,000, SHOULD PROCEED. | 32 |
| 4. | ABOUT 50/60 BEDSITTER UNITS SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED AS CLOSE TO THE HOSPITAL AS POSSIBLE. | 32 |
| 5. | THE CONDITIONS OF OCCUPANCY OF THE BEDSITTER UNITS BY HOSPITAL STAFF SHOULD FULLY RECOGNISE THE SUBSIDY ARRANGEMENTS APPLICABLE TO STAFF ACCOMMODATED IN THE NURSES' HOME. | 32 |
| 6. | CHANGE ROOM FACILITIES ARE NECESSARY AT THE HOSPITAL WHERE STAFF WHO DO NOT LIVE ON THE PREMISES CAN CHANGE FROM THEIR UNIFORMS. | 45 |
| 7. | SWIMMING FACILITIES SHOULD BE PROVIDED AS A STAFF AMENITY AT THE ALICE SPRINGS HOSPITAL. | 47 |
| 8. | THE COST OF THE SWIMMING POOL SHOULD NOT EXCEED \$65,000 AND NOT INCLUDE DIVING FACILITIES. | 48 |


 (C.R. Kelly)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
 Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

3 August 1971.