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Fears flight cuts will hurt health services

There are fears the axing of air services to six communities across western New South Wales will impact on health services.

Air Link services from Dubbo to Bourke, Cobar, Coonamble, Lightning Ridge, and Walgett as well as Mudgee to Sydney, will finish on December 20.

The chief executive of the Bourke Aboriginal Health Service, Judy Johnson, says it relies on the airline to fly in specialists from Sydney, particularly for its mental health program.

"Our psychologists and our mental health counsellors, certainly we've got them flying into Cobar, Bourke and Walgett and they access Brewarrina and Orana Haven, which is at Gongolgon, from those airports too. So not having that service is really going to affect us," she said.

The Mayor of Bourke, Andrew Lewis, says it is devastating for western towns to lose their only air service.

"It's another big hit on the bush. People rely on their air services to Dubbo down to Sydney for professionals health services. Anybody's that sick has to go to Sydney for their cancer treatment," he said.

"Planes are the easiest way. A couple of hours by plane, eight or nine hours by car down and eight or nine back. So it's back to car, back to long distances."

Regional Express (Rex) says the routes are not subsidised by the State Government, and a Federal Government rebate scheme is being phased out.

The federal Member for Calare, John Cobb, is calling on both levels of government to step in to save the vital air routes.

"If regional Australia matters to this Federal Government at all it will review this policy of not helping regional airlines because certainly in the north-west and west of NSW we are going to feel the brunt of it," he said.

The Mid Western Regional Council says it is confident air services between Mudgee and Sydney can be saved.

The council's general manager, Warwick Bennett, says he has arranged to meet the managing director of Rex on Thursday to discuss options to ensure flights continue.

"The passenger numbers that are travelling to Mudgee are one of Rex's highest growth areas and it's somewhere in the vicinity of 15 per cent growth per annum," he said.

"I think there's opportunities for Rex to work closely with us."

Rex will introduce bigger planes on the Dubbo to Sydney and Bathurst to Sydney routes, while Air Link's 10 planes will be used for charter services.

Four jobs are expected to be cut in Dubbo.