



FUNDING BOOST FOR RURAL HEALTH STUDENT TRAINING WELCOMED

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) today welcomed Federal Government moves to boost funding and expand multidisciplinary training places for rural health students.

The Government's initiatives, announced as part of the 2015 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), are aimed at getting more students to experience life outside capital cities and return to work in the bush.

ARHEN is the peak body for Australia's 11 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRHs) located in every state and the NT. UDRHs provide clinical training for thousands of health science students in rural and remote settings across Australia every year in locations such as Geraldton (WA), Mt Isa (Qld), Broken Hill (NSW), Lismore (NSW), Alice Springs (NT), Shepparton (Vic) and Whyalla (SA).

Many rural communities continue to experience challenges in attracting health professionals. However, research shows that students who are exposed to real life challenges and opportunities in these centres through clinical placements are significantly more likely to return to work there when they graduate.

The Government announced in MYEFO that it would expand rural training support for health science students in professions including nursing, midwifery, dietetics, physiotherapy, social work, speech pathology, occupational therapy and others.

Annual funding for each UDRH will also be doubled as part of a restructured Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Programme which aims to remove red tape and streamline training.

In addition, three new rural multidisciplinary training sites for medical, nursing and allied health students will be established, probably in the Broome/Kimberley region of WA, southern/central NSW and SE Qld.

A recent study has highlighted the already significant achievements of UDRHs, with coverage of more than 40% of Australia and 2 million people. The addition of more UDRHs will add further resources and capacity to address the many unique health issues faced by people living in these communities.

"Increased funding for UDRHs and the addition of three new training facilities are exciting developments for people in rural and remote Australia who so often have to battle for access to even the most basic of health services," said ARHEN Chair Professor Sabina Knight.

"Research shows that the 7 million people or 32% of the population who live outside major cities consistently have poorer health and reduced access to health services. Almost all health professionals are harder to recruit and retain in rural and regional areas, some dramatically so.

"The Government's new approach will do much to address this city-country divide and boost health services where they are most needed - in rural Australia - over the longer term."

Prof Knight also called on the Government to increase funding for essential student support infrastructure including accommodation.

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