



## **BUSH HEALTH EDUCATION BOOST WELCOMED**

Today's announcement of three vital new education facilities to help rural health professionals train and work in the bush has been warmly welcomed by peak body, the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN).

The Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie, announced that new University Departments of Rural Health (UDRHs) will be established by Charles Sturt University (NSW), the University of Notre Dame (WA) and the University of Queensland.

“ARHEN welcomes the Government's decision to allocate \$26 million for the new UDRHs to further boost rural and remote communities' access to vital health professionals who are so often in short supply in these areas,” ARHEN Chair Prof Sabina Knight said.

“This initiative increases the number of UDRHs from 12 to 15, improving the capacity to address health workforce maldistribution and improve the lives of the 7 million Australians who live outside capital cities.”

UDRHs provide multidisciplinary education and training in a range of health disciplines including nursing, midwifery, dentistry, psychology, podiatry, occupational therapy, mental health, medicine, social work, speech therapy, physiotherapy and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers.

“A key focus is providing high quality clinical placements in rural and remote centres so students understand first-hand the many opportunities that exist for successful health careers in these communities,” Prof Knight said.

“Research shows that when students train in rural areas they are more likely to return to practice and live in these locations.”

Notre Dame University's new UDRH will service the Broome and Kimberley regions, Charles Sturt University's UDRH will service southern and central NSW while Queensland University's new facility will focus on the needs of the state's south east region.

UDRHs are also involved in research, innovative education and health service models and health professional support. They work within their geographic region to improve, extend and support health service delivery, particularly in high need areas. Lack of access to services taken for granted in capital cities and major regional centres can have a flow on effect on the overall health of people living rurally.

The UDRH program has been a 'beneath the radar' success story for almost 20 years, working in and for the rural communities in which they are located to address workforce shortages.

Underlining the long term success of the UDRH program, the Government recently doubled funding for existing facilities to support the expansion of student placement numbers. UDRHs are currently focused on increasing accommodation and teaching infrastructure so students are well supported during their placements which can last for weeks, months and even a year.

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ARHEN also welcomed the Minister’s announcement of 26 new regional training hubs to encourage aspiring doctors to train, live and work rurally. The training hubs will be established by universities in NSW, the NT, Queensland, SA, Tasmania, Victoria and WA.

“These new hubs will join up the medical training pipeline which is critical in rural, regional and remote areas,” Prof Knight said.

“We look forward to medical colleges and regional training organisations developing innovative approaches to train specialists in these areas. This will build on impressive precedents that are already making a real difference to service delivery through high quality education in general practice and specialty areas and in attracting doctors to practice in rural areas.”

“ARHEN looks forward to working with the new UDRHs and their universities to ensure all Australians, regardless of where they live, can access first rate health and medical services” Prof Knight said.

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