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BUILDING THE RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE – A PRIORITY FOR AUSTRALIA

Additional funding and continued expansion of Australia’s successful University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) must be a key priority for the next Federal Government, according to the sector’s peak body.

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) today called on all political parties to commit to building on results already achieved by the 16 UDRHs to address health workforce maldistribution which affects some 7 million people living in rural and remote locations.

ARHEN (www.arhen.org.au) is the peak UDRH representative body, supporting and enhancing a focus on multidisciplinary health education and training, research, professional support and service development for more than 20 years.

It is well known that people living in rural areas have shorter lives and higher levels of illness and disease than those in major cities, with a lack of health services also impacting on community growth.

Successive governments have continued to invest in the development of rural and remote health professionals through UDRHs, an achievement highlighted by their expansion in numbers from 12 to 16 in the past few years. All are part of ARHEN.

ARHEN Board Chair Assoc Prof Martin Jones said UDRHs represented a sustained commitment to building a strong educational, clinical and academic presence in rural and remote regions.

“UDRHs support thousands of health science students to undertake clinical placements in rural and remote locations every year, providing vital resources to encourage them to return to these communities as professionals after they graduate.

“Additional funding and a growing network are vitally important if UDRHs are to continue to build on their recognised capacity to train health professionals in and for the rural and remote communities they serve around Australia.

“ARHEN also supports further development of a rural generalist pathway for nursing and allied health professionals to strengthen the delivery of quality, cost effective services to these communities.”

ARHEN is currently contributing to a formal evaluation of the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program under which UDRHs are funded and the work of the Rural Health Commissioner who is examining how to improve the distribution of the allied health workforce in rural and remote Australia.

MEDIA CONTACT

ARHEN Chair Prof Martin Jones – 0401 198 633.