



RECORD CROP OF BUSH HEALTH STUDENTS

20 November 2019 -- A RECORD crop of health science students has been trained by Australia's hard-working University Departments of Rural Health, according to latest statistics.

UDRHs are located in rural and remote areas in every state and the NT. They focus on addressing rural health workforce shortages by exposing students from universities around the country to the many career – and lifestyle – opportunities that exist in those communities.

In 2018, nearly 14,000 nursing, midwifery and allied health students took part in clinical placement programs offered by 16 UDRHs. UDRHs supported almost 8,000 nursing and midwifery students and just under 6,000 allied health students.

There are more allied health and nursing students undertaking rural placements with UDRHs than ever before. There has been a 4-fold increase in student numbers over the last decade, made possible through the additional Australian Government funding for UDRHs since 2016.

While nursing and midwifery continue to be well represented in UDRH programs, it's the dramatic increase in the number of allied health students being exposed to rural practice over the last 10 years that has been most noteworthy.

All students are offered a range of placement opportunities including access to service-learning programs in which students deliver clinical care under supervision in student led clinics or in an assisting role. Students also offered cross-cultural, interprofessional and simulation training.

The figures, released ahead of a meeting in Canberra next week, are an increase on 2017 numbers by just under 22% for domestic students.

The 16 UDRH Directors, all members of peak body the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN), are meeting at Parliament House with MPs including the Minister responsible for rural health Mark Coulton and the Education Minister Dan Tehan on 26 November.

"UDRHs are continuing to excel in producing a skilled workforce for rural and remote Australia, as demonstrated by the latest figures," ARHEN Board Chair, Professor Lisa Bourke said.

"Clinical placement numbers have risen steadily and 2018 has again produced a record with the support of a welcome funding boost from the government."

"The long term viability of Australia's vital rural and remote communities depends so much on their ability to attract highly trained health professionals," Prof Bourke said.

"High quality UDRH placements in diverse disciplines such as physiotherapy, radiation science, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work, pharmacy, dentistry, medical imaging and dietetics mean students are well placed to work in rural and remote locations once they graduate."

UDRHs work with and for rural and remote communities across Australia, responding to the needs of their own community and working collaboratively with local partners. They build the capacity of the rural and remote health workforce through student placements, education and health professional support. UDRHs also undertake rural health research, and aim to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well being.

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