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ARHEN Position Paper

Rural Generalist Pathways for Allied Health Professionals

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN), the peak body representing the University Departments of Rural Health (UDRHs), asserts that formalised pathways supported by well recognised and structured programs of study beyond graduation are required for the further development of the rural allied health workforce.

ARHEN further asserts that UDRHs are well placed to offer academic networks, professional development and training which can support rural and remote allied health workforce career pathways.

An Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway (AHRGP) is a rural generalist pathway model that can emerge in different ways and in different settings. Key to an AHRGP is to support the development of the Allied Health workforce in rural and remote settings. It is, then, a multijurisdictional workforce initiative aimed at improving health outcomes for rural and remote communities through improved access to a highly skilled allied health workforce and enhance opportunities for multidisciplinary service delivery.

An AHRGP is composed of three key components¹:

1. Programs of formal education that support allied health professionals working in rural and remote locations to develop the broad clinical and non-clinical practice skills required for rural and remote practice.
2. Workforce policy and employment structures that focus on the progression from entry-level competency to full and extended scope of rural allied health generalist practice.
3. Service models that support and engage allied health professionals to implement innovative and effective solutions to the challenges of delivering care across geographically dispersed and culturally diverse populations.

Rural Generalist Allied Health Practitioners are supported to practice to the full scope of their profession. With competency development and a credentialing process, they may also practice to an extended scope suited to rural and remote settings. Utilising skill sharing appropriate to ongoing competency attainment and local and long arm supervision, this role development will be dictated by the context in which they are working and the health needs of the local community.

Rural generalists practice under the regulatory instruments of their specific allied health profession and the policies of their employer. A rural generalist is NOT a “generic allied health worker” without a primary health professional qualification. There is no such worker in Australia and this is not an output of the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway.”²



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Presently AHRG pathways exist for the following professions: Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Podiatry, Radiography, Social Work, Psychology, Pharmacy and Dietetics.

Role of University Departments of Rural Health

UDRHs are located in each state in regional, rural and remote regions to support better health outcomes for their communities. One way to do this is through supporting allied health workforce development. Utilising these resources in research, education and community advocacy, UDRHs are able to contribute to networks which can strengthen existing workforce supports for workforce development pathways, such as the AHRGP. UDRH staff have strong links to the health, education and the wider communities in which they operate and can use these existing networks and resources to strengthen local workplace and educational components of the AHRGP and other pathways.

Figure 1: UDRH supporting the AHRGP candidate



An AHRGP provides a post-graduate entry level pathway for the professions of Allied Health. Combined with strategies to support pre-entry level students on placement in the rural and remote practice settings, UDRHs can positively partner with other stakeholders supporting the AHRGP. The AHRGP is a workforce strategy to build a stronger rural health



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workforce in order to mitigate long standing workforce maldistribution and address areas of service need in rural and remote areas.

References

1. Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health - The Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway. Available at <https://sarrah.org.au/ahrgp>. Accessed 25 February 2020
2. Resource 2: Rural generalists in the Allied Health professions. *Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health*. Available at <https://sarrah.org.au/ahrgp>. Accessed 25 February 2020.