



April 7 2020

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT: 'COUNTRY AREAS AT GREAT RISK IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC'

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) commends comments made by Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, about how COVID-19 will impact rural and remote communities across Australia.

“Prof Worley’s editorial in the current edition of the online journal *Rural and Remote Health* shows a contemporary understanding of rural and remote health,” ARHEN Board Chair Prof Lisa Bourke said.

“Rural and remote communities require strong ongoing health infrastructure investment, resourcing and empowerment so they can develop local solutions to address their needs.”

Prof Worley, who is also editor-in-chief of the peer reviewed academic publication, says that, “the greatest impact will likely be felt by the most vulnerable populations,” including people who live in rural and remote communities.

Prof Bourke said rural and remote communities already suffer from a workforce shortage and lack of resources in health clinics, with the need during the COVID-19 crisis to screen, isolate and test patients adding considerably to stresses for these health professionals.

Prof Worley also draws attention to the value of First Nation perspectives of health which focus on prevention, spirituality, place and holistic approaches. He calls for a generalist approach to healthcare in rural and remote regions which would integrate care across sectors, professions, places and other aspects of care, including teaching and research.

ARHEN is the collective of 16 University Departments of Rural Health across Australia which support nursing and allied health students to undertake clinical training in rural and remote areas.

“Students have much to learn about healthcare at this time and continuing clinical training during the pandemic adds considerably to their education and contributes to the rural and remote health workforce,” Prof Bourke said.

“Wherever it is safe to do so in accordance with government guidelines and students choose to participate, ARHEN strongly supports continued student education and learning at this time.”

Professor Worley also acknowledges the increase in cooperation, system improvement and data sharing occurring in health care since the pandemic began.

“ARHEN concurs that there has been substantial innovation in healthcare in the past few months, including improvements in telehealth, collaboration between services and information sharing,” Prof Bourke said.



**16 members
in all States
and the NT**

***Better health
through a skilled and effective workforce
for rural and remote Australia.***

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“It would be great to see a continuation of these changes and the current flexibility and responsiveness for rural and remote health services.”
