



NEW RURAL HEALTH COMMISSIONER WELCOMED BY RURAL HEALTH ADVOCACY BODY

3 July 2020 – The appointment of Associate Professor Ruth Stewart as the new National Rural Health Commissioner was welcomed today by the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN).

A/Prof Stewart succeeds the first Rural Health Commissioner (RHC), Prof Paul Worley, whose term expired on 30 June. The RHC works with regional, rural and remote communities, the health sector, universities, specialist training colleges and across all levels of government to improve rural health policies and champion the cause of rural practice.

Dr Stewart’s appointment was announced today by Health Minister Greg Hunt and Regional Health Minister Mark Coulton.

ARHEN represents 16 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) located in rural and remote areas in all States and the NT. UDRHs focus on addressing health workforce shortages which affect some 7 million people who live and work in these locations. Each UDRH supports nursing and allied health students to undertake clinical training in these locations so they experience the many opportunities that exist outside capital cities.

The Government has also expanded and extended the role of the RHC to have a broader focus and announced that two additional Deputy Commissioners will be appointed to look after allied health, nursing and Indigenous health.

“We look forward to continuing the vital work started by Prof Worley by working closely with A/ Prof Stewart and her Deputy Commissioners in their new roles,” ARHEN Chair Prof Lisa Bourke said.

“It is clear A/Prof Stewart, most recently Assoc Prof of Rural Medicine, Director of Rural Clinical Training and Support at James Cook University in Queensland, brings a wealth of valuable experience in rural and remote practice to the role.”

“I’m confident she will understand the vital importance of continuing to address disparities in access to allied health professionals for people in the bush who so often have to either travel large distances or go without the healthcare that those in big cities take for granted.”

“Working collaboratively with the Office of the RHC, Australia’s UDRHs have the people, capacity and expertise to be critical partners in addressing these health workforce maldistribution issues into the future.”

ARHEN will seek a meeting with A/Prof Stewart as soon as possible to discuss her new role, including recommendations arising from a report into improving the access, quality and distribution of allied health care in rural and remote Australia presented by Prof Worley shortly before his departure.

“We also look forward to discussing the work of the new RHC and the recent allied health report with Minister Coulton when he attends the ARHEN regional Board meeting in Tamworth in September,” Prof Bourke said.

MEDIA CONTACT

Prof Lisa Bourke: 0418 340 871