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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Rural health students step up to protect themselves and rural communities from COVID-19**

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) today acknowledged the efforts of rural health students to protect themselves, their patients and rural communities from COVID-19 by getting vaccinated ahead of their clinical placements.

The Chair of ARHEN, Christine Howard, said health students play a vital role in the delivery of clinical services in many rural and remote communities and can help ease the burden on already stretched services.

“It is pleasing to see so many health students from a range of disciplines step up and get vaccinated and join the fight against COVID-19 in rural and remote communities. Around the country student nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists and occupational therapists have been recruited by state health services to support the vaccine roll-out.

Student psychologists and social workers are also supporting many people during lockdown to look after their mental health and to cope with the disruptions to daily life caused by the pandemic.

Many other health students are helping to carry the load in hospital, aged care, disability care and Indigenous health settings so that rural and remote people can continue to access essential health care and support”.

Mrs Howard said that the University Departments of Rural Health were committed to protecting the health and wellbeing of rural and remote communities.

“As future health workforce professionals, it is vital that our students adopt evidence-based practices and model positive health behaviours that put the care and safety of patients and the community first.

We know that the risks and consequences of transmission in vulnerable people and settings such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or aged care facilities is high and the virus can have devastating consequences.

Many health services are now mandating vaccinations for health professionals and students in recognition of the highly contagious nature of the delta variant and the serious risk it poses to the health sector as a whole.

**Australian Rural Health Education Network**  
**Leading Australian rural and remote health education and research**

ARHEN supports the efforts by our rural and remote health service partners to mitigate the risk of transmission and to protect patients, clients and co-workers across the wider health, aged care, mental health and disability care sectors.”

Final year speech pathology student Olivia Wong did not hesitate to get vaccinated prior to her eight-week clinical placement in Katherine through Flinders University, Rural and Remote Health SA & NT.

“I received both of my COVID-19 vaccinations prior to leaving for Katherine. It is important I did everything I could to keep myself and the population that I was about to work with safe from COVID-19. This was especially important knowing I would be entering vulnerable communities.”

Mrs Howard said students also need to protect themselves from the risk of becoming seriously unwell when away from home.

“We do not want to see a situation where a student on placement may be unable to access the intensive medical, family and social supports they may need while they recover.

With the increased availability of safe and effective vaccines through GPs, pharmacists and vaccination clinics it has never been easier to be vaccinated.

ARHEN applauds our rural health students who are pro-active in getting vaccinated ahead of their clinical placements and protecting those around them from the effects of COVID-19.”

### **About ARHEN**

ARHEN is the national association and peak body for the 16 University Departments based in rural and remote locations across Australia. Our purpose is to improve rural and remote health outcomes by delivering high quality health education, research and advocacy.

Across Australia, thousands of health students undertake a rural or remote clinical placement every year as part of their undergraduate or postgraduate training. These student placements are helping to build the rural and remote health workforce of the future.

The ARHEN Chair, Christine Howard is also the Director of the Three Rivers Department of Rural Health based at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga and is available for interview.

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