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Solo country doctors to get more support

A new project from Rural Health West will boost support to solo general practitioners in rural Western Australia to create a more stable and sustainable medical service in small country towns.

The new Strengthening Solo General Practice project has been developed to provide solo general practitioners across the State with greater professional and family support to encourage them to stay living and working in rural communities.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Tim Shackleton said the project was vital in helping retain solo general practitioners in their current practice, which in turn will provide greater stability to their patients and improve health outcomes for rural communities.

'The *Finding My Place** report published in 2015 noted that solo general practitioners are one of the most vulnerable groups of rural doctors as they are more likely to experience professional isolation, higher workloads and have greater difficulties in taking personal and professional development leave, which contributes to higher turnover rates', he said.

'Solo general practitioners are very committed to their communities, and are often reluctant to take leave if they think it may leave their patients without access to medical care, however this can lead to 'burn out'.

'This new project will build on existing supports for solo general practitioners and identify new strategies to avoid them becoming fatigued and isolated and to better support their spouses and families.

'In turn, this will encourage solo general practitioners to stay in their current practice for longer and improve continuity of care for patients,' said Mr Shackleton.

Mr Shackleton said Rural Health West had recently appointed Beth McEwan as Workforce Support Program Coordinator to lead the Strengthening Solo General Practice project.

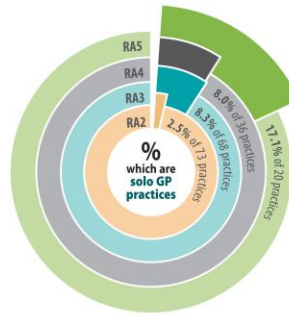
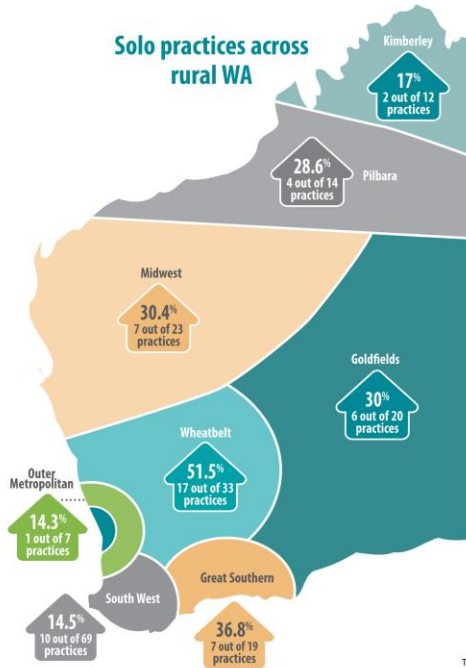
'Beth joins us with 11 years' experience working at The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Western Australia Faculty where she assisted general practitioners with their professional development requirements,' he said.

'Ms McEwan's new role includes liaising with solo general practitioners, their families and local government authorities, developing the solo general practitioner mentoring program, and supporting solo general practitioners to access locum services and continuing professional development opportunities'.

The Strengthening Solo General Practice project is a strategic approach to address current and future risks to solo general practice and will bring significant benefits to rural communities of Western Australia.

Rural Health West is investing \$240,000 over 18 months to develop and operate the Strengthening Solo General Practice project.

Solo GPs in rural WA 2015



There is a higher percentage of solo GPs working in more remote areas



Number of solo practices and solo GPs



Note: Some solo practices are serviced by more than one fly-in-fly-out doctor in a job-share arrangement.



To view the full report, Western Australia's General Practice Workforce Analysis Update, please [visit our website](#) or [contact Rural Health West](#) to request a hard copy.

*Finding My Place report:

The *Finding My Place* report highlighted that many of the factors which negatively influence the attraction and retention of rural doctors in Western Australia are amplified in solo general practice, making it the least sustainable and most 'at risk' medical workforce model in rural Western Australia.

Solo general practitioners who contributed to *Finding My Place* reported:

- higher levels of work related stress
- greater difficulties functioning effectively within and navigating through the health system
- higher levels of physical and mental fatigue

In addition, other rural general practitioners (those not working as solo practitioners) who participated in the *Finding My Place* project, reported that solo general practice was the least attractive employment model for them and they wouldn't entertain working in that setting.

This suggests that while there are growing numbers of general practitioners working in Australia, solo general practice in regional areas will continue to struggle to attract and retain sufficient numbers of suitable doctors.

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