

9 May 2023

## **Nurse and midwife HECS-HELP incentive scheme welcomed but needs to be extended to primary health care sector**

Western Australia's rural primary health care workforce agency today welcomed a State Government initiative to encourage nurses and midwives into rural and remote areas but says the scheme needs to be extended to include those choosing to work in the private sector.

Rural Health West CEO Tim Shackleton said the State Government's HECS-HELP scheme recognised the serious workforce challenges facing the rural health system.

Under the State Government's HECS-HELP scheme graduating nurses and midwives will receive \$12,000 over three years but only if they choose to work in WA's rural and remote public hospitals.

"The State Government is to be commended for providing this investment in nurses and midwives because those working in the public health sector also provide much needed care in local communities where the private system struggles to operate, often due to market failure," Mr Shackleton said.

"Nurses are essential for many rural and remote GP practices in providing the best possible primary health care and are potentially being disadvantaged in attracting staff without this scheme being extended to these practices and other allied health clinics."

"There is growing unhealthy regional competition for health professionals around incentives and remuneration and this scheme, while welcome, has the potential to disadvantage one sector over the other.

"The HECS-HELP scheme is a step in the right direction, and we will be seeking to engage with the State Government regarding the potential to extend the incentive scheme to community based private sector providers."

"Not only would extending the scheme result in a more equitable outcomes across both the public and private primary health care systems, but it would also relieve pressure and stress on our regional hospitals."

Rural Health West (RHW) is WA's sole rural and remote primary health workforce and recruitment agency for GPs, nurses, midwives, dentists, and other allied health professionals.

Workforce research by RHW showed the shortage of allied health professionals, including nurses and midwives, was most acute in the Wheatbelt and Goldfields where

there the proportion of allied health professionals is 1:1,293 people compared with the overall regional and remote average of 1:762 people.

“What our research also shows is that nurses and nurse practitioners are absolutely essential for these communities because they provide such a diverse range of health services which in larger population centres would be provided by other health professionals.”

Mr Shackleton said nurses and midwives were the largest group of rural and remote health professionals comprising nearly 68 per cent of the workforce, but this cohort also represented the highest proportion of professionals intending to leave the sector.

“What our data shows is that over the next five years rural and remote health professional retirements are expected to increase from 1.4 per cent in the short-term to nearly 10 per cent,” Mr Shackleton said.

“Nurses and midwives represent the highest proportion of health professionals in rural and remote areas planning to retire (14.4 per cent) and report the lowest percentage (42.6 per cent) intending to remain in the sector.”

## **ENDS**

Media enquiries:

Kerida Hodge, General Manager Communications and Business Analytics

08 6389 4561

*Rural Health West aims to improve access to quality healthcare for rural communities through the provision of a highly skilled, motivated and sustainable medical and allied health workforce. We are a not-for-profit organisation primarily funded through the WA Country Health Service and the Australian Government Department of Health.*