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Hospital and primary care workforce strategies need to work hand in glove

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Tim Shackleton has commended the Minister for Health for convening this week's WA Health Workforce Summit.

But the head of WA's only dedicated rural and remote primary care workforce agency says outcomes from the summit have to recognise the symbiotic relationship between primary care and the hospital system.

"Recruitment and retention of our rural and remote healthcare workforce is an issue across Australia but is particularly challenging given our State's vast geographic and demographic challenges," Mr Shackleton said.

"One of the key problems we have identified is the way our limited resources are being deployed with preference towards the hospital system and the need to transition or engage staff into primary health.

"The focus on our hospital system is entirely understandable, but we know that a robust primary health care system can take pressure off our hospital system and result in better longer-term health outcomes for communities.

"Primary health care and our hospital workforces working hand in glove has the potential to creating a better overall health system in rural and remote communities."

Mr Shackleton said both the Commonwealth and the State Government had important roles in incentivising and supporting primary health care in rural and remote areas.

"We are currently advocating for the State Government to extend its HECS-HELP scheme to include early career nurses and midwives who work outside the hospital system and are therefore excluded from the support scheme.

"This is an example where we need to make sure that any new programs or incentive schemes do not create potential winners and losers in the competition for staff," he said.

“The key to creating greater equity and accessibility and improvements in health outcomes is by ensuring that the primary health care sector remains supported by all levels of government.”

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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 and Aged Care.