

27 June 2023

Rural and Remote Primary Health Care should be included in State Government's Summit

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Tim Shackleton today welcomed the Western Australian Government's decision to convene the WA Health Workforce Summit.

Mr Shackleton said workforce planning was essential in tackling the issues of attraction and retention of GPs, nurse, and midwives, especially in rural and remote communities.

He said Rural Health West had written to the Minister for Health expressing support for the move and was looking forward to participating in the summit.

"Rural Health West is the State's only agency dedicated to primary health care workforce in rural and remote communities and we want to make sure that the needs of these communities are also recognized and addressed at the summit," Mr Shackleton said.

"We have been providing planning, recruitment and retention programs for rural GPs, nurses and midwives for more than 30 years and we have a deep understanding of the workforce needs in these communities," Mr Shackleton said.

"We also work extremely closely with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in helping these communities who are facing significant primary health care challenges."

Mr Shackleton said that while the workforce challenges facing hospitals in the metropolitan area and some regional centres are regularly in the spotlight, the primary health care needs of rural and remote communities are an important part of the State's workforce mix.

"We know that people in the rural and remote communities often have the worse health outcomes when compared to people living in larger communities, but we also know that adequate primary care takes substantial pressure off hospitals and emergency departments when properly staffed," he said.

“In WA, we have significant geographical and demographic challenges creating a serious maldistribution in health care professionals across rural and remote areas that the summit needs to address.”

Mr Shackleton said Rural Health West would be meeting with the Minister for Health in July to discuss the potential to expand a HECS-HELP debt relief scheme for nurses and midwives to encompass those working in the primary care sector.

“In many rural communities, the hospital, primary care and Aboriginal health sectors are highly interdependent. We are extremely keen to work with the State Government to ensure any initiatives introduced to support health professionals in rural locations are equitable across all sectors,” he said.

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 and Aged Care.