

**RURAL
HEALTH
WEST**

distance is no obstacle



Working hard to ensure **distance is
no obstacle** to **quality healthcare**

OUR VISION

Healthy communities
with access to high
quality healthcare

OUR MISSION

Ensure all rural communities
in Western Australia have
ready access to qualified
and experienced health
professionals

OUR VALUES

Community
Integrity
Innovation
Accountability

About us

Rural Health West exists as there is a disparity between the health of people living in the country and those in the city, and a disparity between the health of Aboriginal Australians and other Australians.

Our purpose is to identify and deliver solutions to help close this gap in health outcomes and life expectancy.

With more than 30 years of experience in the rural health sector, we are known as the 'go to' people for rural health workforce and work collaboratively with government agencies, private organisations and other non-government organisations at local, state and national levels.

One of the strengths of Rural Health West is that our independent status means we are highly responsive, flexible, agile and able to identify and implement solutions to health workforce challenges.

We are a not-for-profit organisation funded through the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and the WA Country Health Service.



Rural Health West has been a tremendous support for my work as a rural locum over many years and as a practice principal when I ran my own practice.

Dr Michael Griffies – locum GP

Ensure all rural communities in WA have ready access to qualified and experienced health professionals

WE ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH

Identifying health workforce needs through **workforce planning**.

Promoting rural health careers to **future health professionals**.

Recruiting health professionals and matching them to the right roles.

Supporting rural health professionals by providing **locums, family assistance, practice management and business support**.

Building and extending the skills of rural health professionals through **continuing professional development**.

Ensuring rural communities have access to specialised and targeted healthcare through **outreach programs**.

Working intensively with communities and health professionals to address critical **health workforce shortages**.

Working with partners on **new initiatives** that improve the health of rural communities.

HOW WE DO IT

We work hard to deliver **results** for rural communities and our funders.

We base our strategies on **evidence**.

We work **collaboratively** with partners because the health sector is complex and no single agency can address all the issues.

We understand the **trends** in rural health service delivery and keep abreast of latest developments.

We engage with and respond to the needs of **rural communities**.

We are **responsive** to requests from our customers, partners and funders.

WHAT WE ASPIRE TO ACHIEVE

Healthy rural communities with access to high quality healthcare.



Workforce solutions

Rural Health West provides a health workforce recruitment service and offers a wide range of programs to attract and support rural health professionals including general practitioners, nurses, midwives, dentists, occupational therapists, psychologists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, and other health professionals.

Each year, we recruit more than 100 health professionals into rural WA. We provide case management to help match health professionals to the right role in the right location. This case management approach aims to enhance the retention of health professionals in their roles. We also provide grants to support health professionals to relocate to rural roles.

We provide comprehensive orientations to health professionals who are new to rural communities so that they have the best possible chance of success when they commence work.

Rural Health West works closely with many shire-run and shire-supported general practices and rural communities in Western Australia, providing viability and sustainability studies and developing unique solutions to local health workforce issues.

We maintain a comprehensive database of rural health professionals in Western Australia, which provides useful insight into the rural workforce. This information is used for needs assessment planning, workforce planning, with de-identified information provided to other stakeholders on request.

DR YOLLANDA CHIKARI – GERALDTON.



DR RHONA MARQUES – NARROGIN.

Retention initiatives

An important aspect of our work is to provide support mechanisms which encourage health professionals to remain working in rural communities.

We provide a GP locum service and a short-term relief placement service for nurses, midwives, dentists and other health professionals. Each year, we source more than 2,000 days of cover to enable rural health professionals to take leave or attend professional development.

Each year, through the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, we offer Health Workforce Scholarship Program grants valued at \$1,000,000 to provide financial support for health professionals to access education and upskilling.

We work closely with other health sector organisations to develop and manage health professional networks in each region to provide opportunities for health professionals to engage in shared education, build collegiate networks and deliver regionally-integrated health services.

Family integration and satisfaction are important factors in retaining health professionals in rural locations. We provide grants to enable partners to upskill and retrain to improve their employment prospects. We also offer comprehensive family programs at our main conferences to give families opportunities to engage with one another.



Receiving HWSP funding to undertake further training has meant that I can provide a service to the local community, which they would otherwise need to travel to Perth to access.

Emma Tozana – Advanced Driver-Trained Occupational Therapist



Promoting rural health careers

Rural Health West works with Western Australian universities and other health sector organisations to showcase the benefits of rural health careers to university students and new graduates.

We work with the universities to offer immersion experiences in rural and remote communities so that health students discover the advantages and benefits of rural health careers. These experiences also help them to develop professional links with potential future employers and communities. For students who ultimately choose to practice in the metropolitan area, these experiences also serve to provide insight into the challenges of country life, should they encounter rural patients in their future careers.

We provide a range of scholarships and sponsorships for health students to access professional development related to rural practice. This includes scholarships for students of rural origin to undertake their students, financial support to complete rural placements and attendance at conferences with rural themes.

Each year, we work with student rural health clubs to provide opportunities for students to learn more about rural careers.

Rural Health West also works with medical students and doctors who have participated in the Bonded Medical Program, providing support to help them to meet their return-of-service obligations.

STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME AUSTRALIA AT MIMBI CAVES DURING THEIR KIMBERLEY IMMERSION EXPERIENCE.



DELEGATES UPSKILLING IN SPLINT/CAST APPLICATION
AND PLASTERING DURING THE RURAL HEALTH WEST
RURAL EMERGENCY MEDICINE FORUM.

Education and upskilling

Rural Health West provides a comprehensive suite of education and upskilling opportunities for rural health professionals.

Each year, we deliver education to around 1,200 health professionals through more than 30 workshops, conferences and forums. These forums provide specialised education in clinical areas such as anaesthetics, paediatrics, obstetrics and emergency medicine.

In partnership with WA Country Health Service, we provide procedural mentoring programs to support general practitioners with newly-acquired procedural skills in anaesthetics, obstetrics and surgery to become more confident and proficient in their extended practise.

We also provide support to overseas trained doctors working to pass their Fellowship exams.

Rural Health West also has a dedicated podcast series – *Distance is no obstacle* – to enable health professionals to access clinical learning on the go.



I was nervous about beginning to practice outside the tertiary environment, without specialist backup. It has been very comforting to have someone to go to and learn the logistics of practicing in a whole new environment, as well as within a whole new paradigm. Having this program allowed me to find my footing and contribute to the workforce – otherwise I am not confident that I would have actually started practising.

Dr Heidi Tudehope – GP obstetrics mentoring participant



Outreach services

Many communities in rural Western Australia have limited access to specialised health services.

The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care funds a range of outreach health programs enabling health professionals to deliver much-needed specialised visiting healthcare to rural communities.

Rural Health West administers visiting services through a number of outreach programs:

- Eye and Ear Surgical Support Service
- Follow-up Ear and Hearing Health Service
- Healthy Ears – Better Hearing, Better Listening
- Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program
- Rural Health Outreach Fund
- Visiting Optometrists Scheme

Each year, we administer the delivery of more than 70,000 occasions of service to people in around 130 communities across Western Australia.

We also work in partnership with other health organisations on two programs aimed at improving the delivery of health services. These are Ear Health Coordination Program and the Coordination of Indigenous Eye Health Program.



Everywhere we went, we uncovered patients needing immediate treatment, as well as multiple generations at high-risk of facing the same environmental, genetic and social issues.

Dr Mark Thomas (pictured left) during one of his visiting clinics

Other initiatives

Rural Health West is involved in a range of other initiatives that support our aim to ensure rural communities have access to quality healthcare.

Other activities include:

- Ongoing capture of health workforce data to identify health workforce priorities
- Advocating for improvements to the health system and policies that improve healthcare in rural communities
- Collaborating with health stakeholders on region-specific issues to develop and implement place-based solutions

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