

30/06/2025

National motion on local government involvement in primary healthcare is a welcome step forward

Rural Health West welcomes the passing of Motion 46 at the 2025 National General Assembly of Local Government, calling for reform to the distribution of Financial Assistance Grants to rural local governments supporting primary healthcare services.

The motion was brought forward by the Shire of Lake Grace, on behalf of six local governments in rural WA who have formed the Local Government Rural Health Funding Alliance.

The motion acknowledges a long-standing and growing issue; local governments are increasingly funding general practice and primary care to ensure access in rural communities.

In 2023, Rural Health West partnered with the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) to survey the extent of this support across WA.

The findings were significant: 69 Local Governments were contributing \$6.8 million (net) annually through financial and in-kind assistance to sustain local primary healthcare services.

More than three-quarters of this funding supported general practice – and 92 per cent of it came from communities with fewer than 5,000 residents.

Rural Health West Chief Executive officer, Professor Catherine Elliott said the motion's passing places national focus on a pressing issue that affects communities across Australia.

“Local governments are natural placemakers. They are well-placed to welcome and support health professionals, facilitate integration into communities, and foster the liveability that attracts and retains workforce. However, they should not need to directly fund primary healthcare services.

“Such arrangements are often the result of market failure – local governments step in not because it is their responsibility, but because they know these services are vital to the wellbeing, sustainability and vitality of their towns.

“The data we gathered with WALGA made clear what many in rural Australia already know – local governments are propping up essential health services to meet their communities’ needs.

“This motion is a positive step towards broader recognition and we hope it leads to greater engagement by Commonwealth and State governments in co-designing sustainable and fit-for-purpose solutions,” Professor Elliott said.

Rural Health West commends the Shire of Lake Grace and the Local Government Rural Health Funding Alliance for their efforts in promoting a national conversation on rural health access.

ENDS

Media enquiries:

Belinda Cipriano, Communications Officer
08 6389 4500

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, Disability and Ageing.