

9 September 2025

Rural Health West welcomes analysis showing growth in GP training interest and rural generalism

Rural Health West welcomes new analysis by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand (MDANZ), which shows that around one in three Australian medical graduates progress into GP training.

The collaborative study, which was presented by RACGP President Dr Michael Wright at the recent Medical Deans' Annual Conference, shows that 33 per cent of recent Australian medical graduates have progressed into GP training.

The University of Notre Dame Fremantle has one of the nation's highest progression rates, with 51 per cent of medical graduates entering GP training.

The analysis was based on the incoming 2025 Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) program cohort.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Professor Catherine Elliott said the findings were heartening but reinforced the need for sustained focus.

"GPs are vital to the health and wellbeing of our rural communities. It is wonderful to see the tide turning with more graduates finding their way to general practice and rural generalism as career pathways.

"We are particularly pleased to see local medical programs, such as The University of Notre Dame Fremantle, contributing strongly to this positive trend."

"Early exposure is one of the strongest predictors of future rural or generalist intent. Immersive programs such as the Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion – which Rural Health West has collaborated on with both Notre Dame and Curtin University since 2018 – provide incredible experiences for students, encouraging them to consider careers as generalists and the opportunities offered by rural medical practice.

However, Professor Elliott said that annual MDANZ survey into student intent shows that collaboration across the sector remains essential.

"The 2024 MDANZ results show that student interest in general practice continues to decline, although the recognition of rural generalism as a specialty has sparked growing interest in rural medical careers.

"We must continue to work together – universities, colleges, health services, government and community – to ensure general practice is not only promoted as a career of choice,

but supported as a sustainable, fulfilling profession that meets the needs of rural and remote communities.”

At the WA Rural GP Summit convened by Rural Health West in March 2024, increasing student interest in GP and rural generalism was highlighted as fundamental to ensuring sustainable access to primary care in rural and remote communities.

Strategies identified at the Summit included:

- Marketing general practice as the ‘go to’ career option for medical students and prevocational doctors.
- Emphasising the variety, scope and flexibility of careers in general practice and rural generalism.
- Supporting rural clinical schools and immersive placements that inspire rural career choices.

Rural Health West looks forward to continuing to work across the sector to build on this momentum to ensure a strong and sustainable GP workforce for rural communities into the future.

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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, Disability and Ageing.