

1 December 2025

Kimberley GP Dr Catherine Engelke and senior health leader Avril Fahey elected to Rural Health West Board

Rural Health West is pleased to announce the election of Dr Catherine Engelke and Ms Avril Fahey to its Board.

A proud Aboriginal woman born and raised in the Kimberley, Dr Engelke brings deep cultural connection, lived experience and clinical leadership expertise to the organisation.

Dr Engelke has devoted her career to improving health outcomes for people living in the remote East Kimberley, providing comprehensive, culturally grounded and person-centred care in some of WA's most isolated communities.

She will take on the role vacated by fellow Kimberley GP Dr Stephanie Trust, who has completed her tenure on the Board. The two share a strong friendship and a commitment to strengthening Aboriginal health and workforce sustainability in the region.

Ms Fahey joins the Board with more than 20 years' experience across aged care, community services and the hospital sector. Beginning her career as an occupational therapist, she has dedicated her professional life to improving outcomes for older people and vulnerable communities.

Having held senior roles with Silver Chain and St John of God Midland Public and Private Hospital, Ms Fahey contributed to primary care system development through the WA Primary Health Alliance Clinical Commissioning Committee and now leads aged care and health engagement with the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Beyond her health leadership, Avril represented Australia in women's cricket and is currently a National Selector for Cricket Australia.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Professor Catherine Elliott said she was delighted to welcome both Dr Engelke and Ms Fahey to the organisation.

"Catherine brings remarkable insight, cultural leadership and deep connection to her community," Professor Elliott said.

"She has dedicated her career to delivering high-quality health care for people living in the East Kimberley and is an outstanding role model for the next generation of rural clinicians.

"We are also thrilled to welcome Avril Fahey, whose extensive leadership across aged care, community services and hospital operations will bring valuable strategic and governance expertise to our Board. Avril's understanding of workforce, system reform and consumer needs will further strengthen our commitment to improving access to care for rural and remote communities.

“Both Catherine and Avril bring a blend of cultural insight, clinical experience and sector-wide leadership that will support our vision for a strong, sustainable rural health workforce.”

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Biography

Dr Catherine Engelke MBBS FRACGP

Dr Catherine Engelke is a rural general practitioner based in Kununurra, Western Australia. An Aboriginal woman born and raised in the Kimberley, Dr Engelke brings a deep connection to the region and a strong commitment to delivering comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and person-centred care.

She began her career in health as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer in Halls Creek in 1989 before completing her nursing degree and working across Halls Creek, Derby, and Kununurra. In 2003, she moved to Perth to study medicine and returned home to Kununurra in 2011, where she has since worked as a Medical Officer.

In addition to her clinical leadership, she supports the next generation of rural doctors through teaching and mentoring roles with RACGP, ACRRM and The Rural Clinical School of WA.

Dr Engelke’s lived experience, combined with her extensive professional background, provides valuable insight into the health needs of rural and Aboriginal communities. She is dedicated to improving access to care and strengthening the rural health workforce across Western Australia.

Avril Fahey – Board Director, Rural Health West

Avril Fahey is an accomplished health and governance leader with more than two decades of experience across aged care, community services and the hospital sector. Beginning her career as an occupational therapist, Avril has dedicated her professional life to improving outcomes for older people and vulnerable communities, and brings insight into service delivery, workforce, system reform and consumer needs.

Avril spent many years in senior leadership roles at Silver Chain, shaping models of care and supporting community-based service delivery for complex client populations. She later moved into executive roles with St John of God Midland Public and Private Hospital, where she oversaw clinical and operational performance in a fast-growing metropolitan–rural interface. Avril has also contributed to primary care system development as a member of the WA Primary Health Alliance Clinical Commissioning Committee.

She is currently Director, Aged Care and Health Engagement with the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, where she plays a key role in national aged care reforms and stakeholder engagement across the health and community sectors.

Avril is a director on the Diabetes WA Board, a member of the School of Business and Law Advisory Board at Edith Cowan University and is the former Chair of the Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) being the first woman to hold the role in the organisation’s history.

Alongside her health leadership, Avril enjoyed a distinguished sporting career, representing Australia in women's cricket and contributing to the 1997 World Cup win. Today she continues to support high-performance sport as a National Selector for Cricket Australia.

Avril holds a Masters degree in Human Movement from The University of Western Australia and is widely regarded for her leadership, strategic capability and commitment to improving health equity and community wellbeing.

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