



Media Statement

MEDIA RELEASE

17 March 2026

Aboriginal voices to guide Rural Health West through new advisory committee

Expert advice from Aboriginal people will improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people, with Rural Health West establishing its first Aboriginal Advisory Committee (AAC).

The Committee has been created to ensure Aboriginal voices guide Rural Health West's work with communities, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and the broader health workforce across Western Australia.

The inaugural Committee is chaired by Dr Stephanie Trust, a Gidja and Walmajarri woman, who is Clinical Director of the Wunan Health and Well-Being Centre in Kununurra and a former Rural Health West Board member. Adjunct Professor Tuguy Esgin, Ashley Councillor, Mitchell Walley, Jessica Curnuck, Dr Christine Clinch and Stephen Morrison are also members of the Committee and come from all over WA.

The AAC will provide advice directly to the Rural Health West Board and staff, with a focus on:

- Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs and Aboriginal organisations
- Supporting growth of the Aboriginal health workforce
- Guiding culturally strong policies and programs
- Advocating for improved health outcomes for Aboriginal people
- Supporting reconciliation across WA

Aboriginal Advisory Committee inaugural Chair Dr Stephanie Trust said the Committee will create an opportunity to ensure Aboriginal perspectives shape how Rural Health West's programs and services are designed and delivered.

"Aboriginal people understand the realities our communities face and the importance of care that respects culture, connection and community," Dr Trust said.

"We need Aboriginal voices influencing every part of the health system – from the way services are delivered to how programs are designed and decisions are made.

"This Committee creates a space for that influence. It allows Aboriginal leaders to share their knowledge and lived experience so Rural Health West can work in ways that genuinely support our communities."

Dr Trust said strengthening Aboriginal leadership in health was critical to creating sustainable change in rural and remote Australia.

"Our communities have the knowledge and the capability to shape solutions. When Aboriginal people are part of the leadership and decision-making, it strengthens

the whole system and helps ensure the services being delivered truly meet community needs.”

Improving health outcomes for Aboriginal peoples is a key part of Rural Health West's mission. The organisation supports a range of programs that prioritise Aboriginal communities – including outreach services delivered specifically for Aboriginal patients, recruitment and locum support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), and the annual Aboriginal Health Conference.

Rural Health West CEO Catherine Elliott said Rural Health West is committed to listening, learning, building relationships and partnering.

“Aboriginal leadership must sit at the centre of decisions that impact Aboriginal peoples and communities. The Aboriginal Advisory Committee will guide our work to ensure it is culturally strong, respectful and grounded in community priorities.”

The Committee will meet four times per year, with communiques shared following each meeting to promote transparency and accountability.

The inaugural meeting was held on 13 March 2026 in Whadjuk Boodjar (Perth), just prior to the WA Rural Health Conference and WA Rural Health Excellence Awards.

Ends

****Photos available***

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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.