

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Great Southern continues decade-long record for retaining rural doctors**

The Great Southern has maintained its position as Western Australia's strongest region for retaining rural GPs, with new workforce data showing doctors are continuing to build long-term careers in the region.

Rural Health West's latest *Rural General Practice in Western Australia: Annual Workforce Update* shows more than half of the region's GPs (53.5 per cent) have worked in their current principal practice for more than five years.

At 9.4 years, the Great Southern also recorded the longest average length of employment in a principal practice of any region in WA.

The result continues a remarkable trend, with the Great Southern recording the highest proportion of long-stay GPs every year since Rural Health West began reporting regional retention data in 2015.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Professor Catherine Elliott said the figures demonstrated the region's ability not only to attract doctors, but to retain them.

"Recruiting doctors to rural communities is important but retaining them long term is what creates truly sustainable healthcare services," Professor Elliott said.

"The Great Southern continues to stand out as a region where doctors choose to build long-term careers, establish roots in the community and develop enduring relationships with their patients.

"When a doctor stays for many years, communities benefit from greater continuity of care, stronger clinical leadership and improved opportunities for mentoring and training the next generation of health professionals."

The Great Southern workforce also continued to grow, increasing by 16 GPs between November 2024 and November 2025 to reach 130 doctors - a 14 per cent increase.

Professor Elliott said the combination of strong retention and workforce growth was a significant achievement.

"These results tell us that the Great Southern remains an attractive place for health professionals to live and work," she said.

"We continue to see doctors drawn to the region by the lifestyle, professional opportunities, strong health services and welcoming communities."

Professor Elliott said the success of the Great Southern workforce was also supported by strong professional networks and opportunities for ongoing connection and development.

The Rural Health West-led Great Southern Health Professionals Network (GSHPN) unites health professionals across the region for professional development, networking and educational events.

"We know that feeling connected to colleagues and the broader community is an important part of retaining health professionals in rural areas," Professor Elliott said.

"The GSHPN is designed to strengthen professional relationships to reduce isolation. It helps health professionals feel supported and contribute to the positive workforce culture we see across the Great Southern."

Despite the positive results, Professor Elliott said emerging housing pressures posed a growing challenge for workforce attraction and retention across parts of the region.

Recent analysis by Shelter WA highlighted significant shortages of long-term rental accommodation in several Great Southern communities. It found some towns experienced high levels of short-stay accommodation and extremely limited availability of long-term rentals.

"Housing availability is increasingly becoming a workforce issue for the rural health sector," Professor Elliott said.

"While communities such as Albany, Denmark and Mount Barker remain highly attractive places to live, we are hearing from employers and health professionals that finding suitable and affordable housing can be difficult.

"In some communities, housing availability can become a barrier to recruitment, particularly when health services are competing for workforce in a tight labour market."

Professor Elliott said maintaining the region's strong workforce performance would require continued attention to the broader factors that influence workforce attraction and retention.

"The Great Southern's success over the past decade demonstrates what is possible when communities, health services and health professionals work together," she said.

"However, maintaining that success requires us to continue addressing emerging challenges such as housing availability, so that health professionals can continue to build long-term careers in the region.

"The Great Southern has set the benchmark for GP retention in regional Western Australia. The challenge now is ensuring the conditions remain in place for that success to continue."

Rural Health West has been publishing a GP workforce report for 25 years. It is one of the most comprehensive annual analyses of the state's rural GP workforce and supports workforce planning, policy development and advocacy across regional Western Australia.

## **ENDS**

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### **Media Notes:**

*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.*