

MEDIA RELEASE

23 June 2026

Rural WA reaches record GP workforce, but retaining doctors remains the next challenge

Rural Western Australia is home to more GPs than ever before, according to new workforce data released by Rural Health West.

The latest *Rural General Practice in Western Australia: Annual Workforce Update* shows 1,067 GPs were working across rural and remote Western Australia at 30 November 2025 – an increase of 58 doctors compared with the previous year and the highest number ever recorded.

The result represents the largest annual increase in rural GP numbers in more than a decade and includes 30 additional resident GPs living and working in rural communities. The growth reverses a trend towards increasing reliance on fly-in, fly-out and drive-in, drive-out models.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Professor Catherine Elliott said reaching a record rural GP workforce is an achievement that should be celebrated.

"Behind every one of these numbers is a doctor providing care to a rural community, supporting patients and helping ensure people can access healthcare closer to home," Professor Elliott said.

"It's particularly encouraging to see growth in resident GPs, because doctors who live in their communities become part of the fabric of those towns. They support local schools, businesses and sporting clubs, supervise future health professionals and provide the continuity of care that rural patients value."

The report also points to improving workforce stability across much of rural Western Australia. Overall GP turnover remained steady at 13.2 per cent, continuing a longer-term downward trend that suggests more doctors are choosing to remain in regional communities.

In the Goldfields, GP turnover fell below 10 per cent for the first time in a decade, while the Pilbara recorded a significant turnaround after several years of exceptionally high turnover.

Professor Elliott said these results reinforced the importance of investing in workforce retention initiatives.

One such initiative is Rural Health West's statewide network of Health Professionals Networks, which connect more than 5,500 health professionals across regional Western Australia through education, professional development, networking and peer support.

"Retention doesn't happen by accident," Professor Elliott said.

"We consistently hear that health professionals who feel connected to their colleagues and communities are more likely to remain working in rural areas. That's why investment in initiatives such as Health Professionals Networks is so important – they help build the professional and personal connections that encourage people to stay."

Rural Health West continues to hear concerns about the financial viability of general practice services across many smaller communities. Local governments are increasingly stepping in to provide financial and in-kind support to help maintain access to healthcare services.

"Healthcare funding is not traditionally a local government responsibility, and there is growing recognition that more sustainable long-term solutions are needed," Professor Elliott said.

Rural Health West is working with the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), local governments and other stakeholders to better understand the challenges facing small rural practices and identify alternative service delivery and funding models.

Professor Elliott said housing availability and affordability were also emerging as major workforce issues across regional WA.

"Increasingly, health professionals are asking about housing before they will accept a position," she said.

"Workforce planning can no longer be separated from issues such as housing, community infrastructure and regional development."

While challenges remain, Professor Elliott said the latest workforce figures demonstrated that regional WA remained an attractive and rewarding place for health professionals to live and work.

"Our focus now is ensuring that workforce growth is matched by the support systems, infrastructure and policy settings needed to retain those health professionals and build a sustainable workforce for the future."

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.

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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.