

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wheatbelt GP workforce remains stable as communities confront sustainability challenge

The Wheatbelt's rural GP workforce has remained stable, according to new data released by Rural Health West.

However, concerns remain about the long-term sustainability of general practice services across many smaller inland communities.

The latest *Rural General Practice in Western Australia: Annual Workforce Update* shows 90 GPs were practising across the Wheatbelt at 30 November 2025, an increase of five doctors from the previous year.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer Professor Catherine Elliott said the result reflected the resilience of the Wheatbelt health workforce and the communities working hard to maintain local healthcare services.

"The Wheatbelt has maintained a relatively stable GP workforce over many years, despite facing some unique challenges associated with delivering healthcare across a large geographic area and numerous small communities," Professor Elliott said.

"The latest figures are encouraging and demonstrate the commitment of local practices, health professionals and communities to ensuring people can continue to access healthcare close to home."

However, Professor Elliott said the data also highlighted why long-term sustainability remains a critical issue for the region.

The Wheatbelt has the highest concentration of solo GP practices in rural WA. Of the region's 39 general practices, 17 are operated by a single doctor, representing almost 44 per cent of all practices.

"Many Wheatbelt communities are supported by small general practices operating in challenging financial environments," Professor Elliott said.

"Unlike larger regional centres, many of these communities simply do not have the population base required to generate sufficient Medicare revenue to support a traditional general practice business model."

As a result, the Wheatbelt is the region in WA where local governments are most involved in supporting general practice services through direct and indirect financial assistance.

Rural Health West is working with the Western Australian Local Government Association, local governments and other stakeholders to better understand the growing role local governments play in identifying more sustainable solutions for the future.

"Local governments have stepped in to support general practice because they recognise that access to healthcare is essential to the liveability and economic sustainability of their communities," Professor Elliott said.

"While councils have shown tremendous leadership, healthcare funding is not traditionally a local government responsibility, and many are questioning whether this model is sustainable in the long term."

Rural Health West recently presented evidence to the [Senate Inquiry into Rural, Regional and Remote Medicare Access and Funding](#), highlighting concerns that current Medicare funding arrangements do not adequately reflect the realities of delivering healthcare in many small rural communities.

"The Wheatbelt demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of the current system," Professor Elliott said.

"We have communities that are determined to retain local healthcare services and local governments willing to help, but we also have a funding model that was not designed for many of the realities faced by small rural practices."

Despite these challenges, Professor Elliott said the Wheatbelt remained a region of opportunity for rural medicine.

"Wheatbelt communities offer doctors the opportunity to become part of the fabric of their community and build long-term relationships with their patients," she said.

"The challenge for all of us is ensuring those communities have access to sustainable service models that can continue to deliver high-quality healthcare for decades to come."

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.