



Australian Government

A Healthier Rural Australia

BRIDGING THE CITY-COUNTRY DIVIDE





*Rural communities
contribute **to the health
and quality of life** of all
Australians*

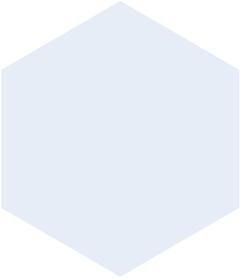
Rural GPs are getting more support to teach and train the next generation of health workers for country Australia

The one third of Australians who choose to live in our regional and rural communities are of critical importance to this nation's way of life. Rural communities contribute to the health and quality of life of all Australians – providing food, water, energy, minerals and a healthy natural environment – as well as to our nation's prosperity.

It is a fact, though, that despite their contribution, people who choose to live, work and raise their families in regional Australia face barriers in accessing the same range of health and aged care services as those living in urban Australia. The statistics tell the story.

Compared to metropolitan areas, rural and remote Australians generally experience higher rates of premature death, mortality and chronic disease. They have lower incomes, and fewer educational and employment opportunities. Historically, they've had a poorly distributed health workforce that does not sufficiently meet the needs of communities as they become more remote. They face higher living costs, difficulties sourcing fresh food, harsher environmental conditions and relative social isolation.

Throw in further challenges like weather, flood, drought, and we see the impact of dealing with these challenges on family life – including mental



... services better tailored to meet the needs of local communities...



illness and substance abuse – can all too quickly take hold.

Improving health outcomes

Through its ongoing commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians, the Government continues to see improvements in the health outcomes of people living in regional communities. The Government's targeted initiatives and incentives mean more services better tailored to meet the needs of local communities, and more doctors, nurses and other health professionals living and working in areas where they are most needed.

Attracting health professionals

A range of workforce programs, including basing GP training places in rural areas as much as possible and better targeting financial incentives for doctors, is attracting doctors and dentists to regional areas, and keeping them there. A new integrated rural training pipeline will help more health practitioners to complete the different stages of their medical training, from student to specialist, in rural areas. Rural GPs are getting more support to teach and train the next generation of health workers for country Australia.

Participants in the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Independent Pathway training to be GPs will have streamlined arrangements for claiming Medicare benefits until their training finishes. Support for locums, relieves GPs and ensures continuity of services in rural areas.

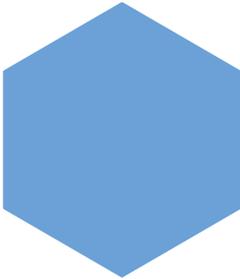
Better health and aged care

Improvements continue in primary care in regional and rural Australia. With rates of chronic disease generally much higher in rural and regional areas, the Government's innovative Health Care Homes trial – providing patients with chronic conditions with a 'home base' for coordinated care – will be of real benefit in these areas.

In aged care, rural and remote services are being improved through a better way to classify services 'remoteness', to better align increases in the rate of the viability supplement paid to regional aged care providers to meet their higher operating costs.

Pharmacy, critical in rural and regional areas, is strongly supported through specially targeted incentives and workforce programs.

People at risk of the sight threatening diabetes related retinopathy disease, will find it easier to have eye checks, with a special retinal camera.



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Tackling the ice scourge

The Government's unprecedented \$298.3 million, four-year investment to tackle the scourge of ice and its devastating impact on individuals, families and communities, begins to roll out on 1 July. With funding delivered by local Primary Health Networks, this initiative followed the National Ice Taskforce report, which noted high usage rates in rural and regional areas.

Improving mental health

Improved mental health care is of fundamental importance to rural Australia. Central to the Government's mental health reforms will be a regional approach to planning and integrating services, and better matching services to individual needs. The new Primary Health Networks will play a key role in leading the development of regional mental health and suicide prevention plans. A proposed new digital mental health gateway will make a real difference to regional Australia, connecting people to information, advice and the services they need.

Keeping active

Children in regional Australia are encouraged to stay active through the continuation of the Sporting Schools and Play.Sport.Australia participation programs. The Girls Make Your Move advertising campaign is also covering regional Australia.

The Australian Government is profoundly committed to bridging the city-country divide and to acknowledging the invaluable part rural communities play in Australia's economic and general wellbeing. Access to quality health and aged care is a must have to maintaining vibrant, productive rural communities in 21st century Australia.