

MEDIA RELEASE

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Regional health services to receive a boost

Health services in the North West region of Victoria are set to benefit from a new initiative that will boost local infrastructure and service models.

The *Sustainable Practice* initiative, auspiced by RWAV and supported by community members, businesses and local government aims to address the impact of the drought, a decline in economic activity and GP shortages are having on the availability of health services in the region.

The initiative will bring together Mayors and hospital CEOs in the region to discuss the most advantageous local solutions available to address health workforce shortages.

Additionally, a sub-regional allied health model will be developed collectively by members of the community groups to support the local health services.

North West Municipalities Association executive and participant Daryl Argall said, "The North West Region has been in a drought for 11 years and unfortunately this has resulted in population loss.

"As population declines, the level of economic activity declines as a consequence, which in turn leads to services being reduced and businesses closed.

"That is why it is critical to work with organisations that will support, sustain and strengthen our community."

According to the latest GP workforce data, 37 per cent of general practitioners in the North West region of Victoria hope to reduce their working hours within the next five years, and another 42 per cent would like to relocate within that same period.

Sharon Kosmina RWAV General Manager Policy & Research explains the need for a coordinated approach.

"How we approach health workforce innovation will influence the sustainability of our rural communities.

"At a time when towns are in great need of doctors, it is important to take steps to stabilise and sustain existing health services in the region from the ground up.

“We can influence our destiny. Real differences can be made from our local community efforts,” Ms Kosmina said.

With 36 per cent of general practices in the North West region being solo practices, sustainability is crucial.

Local participants included representatives from Rural Northwest Health, West Wimmera Health Services, Women’s Health Grampians, Stawell Regional Health, Woomelang & District Bush Nursing Centre, Horsham Medical Centre, Wimmera Development Association, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership (PCP), Grampians Community Health Service, Dunmunkle Health Services, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, Harrow Bush Nursing Centre, Wimmera Health Care Group, West Vic Division of General Practice, Grampians Pyrenees PCP, Woomelang & District Bush Nursing Centre and Ballarat Health Services.

Council representation in the region included; Horsham Rural City, West Wimmera Shire, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians Shire, Yarriambiack Shire, Ararat Rural City, Swan Hill Rural and Buloke Shire.

Other key organisations involved are: Regional Development Victoria, RWAV and Department of Human Services.

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Media enquiries: for further information contact RWAV General Manager Policy & Research Sharon Kosmina on 0400 130 607.

About RWAV – Rural Workforce Agency Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation working with communities that have underserved health needs. We do this through a number of initiatives that recruit, support and advocate for the health workforce throughout rural and regional Victoria.