

# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE AT RWAV

## ANTHONY WEBB, RWAV GENERAL MANAGER – OPERATIONS & COMPLIANCE



**In 2020 Anthony Webb, General Manager – Operations and Compliance celebrated his 20-year anniversary working at RWAV. During his time here, he has witnessed first hand the changing landscape of rural health in Victoria, and the contributions made by RWAV to improve access to primary health care services in rural and regional communities. Anthony shares with us the moments that are most memorable and his proudest achievements since joining RWAV in 2000.**

**Tell us about your start at RWAV and the roles that you have had.**

I was the Director of Corporate Services at the Central Highlands District Health Service based in Emerald, Queensland, when I applied for the role of Executive Officer with RWAV. I finished in Emerald on 30 June 2000 and drove down to Melbourne, and have been here ever since. My first day at RWAV was on 10 July 2000, back when the office was based in Carlton.

As Executive Officer, I managed day-to-day operations, encompassing program coordination, finance, budgeting and human resources. While my job title has changed over the years, I have primarily retained the responsibilities for operations, finance and budgeting.

**What achievements are you most proud of in your 20 years of working with RWAV?**

I am proud that RWAV remains a viable and operational organisation, and will celebrate 22 years of operations this year when many organisations that were in existence at the time, and part of the rural medical workforce in Victoria when I started with RWAV, have ceased.

It is a testimony to the work that RWAV has done, and continues to do, to address improved access to primary health care services for rural Victorian communities, and that the Australian and the Victorian Governments have confidence in RWAV's ability to deliver programs and services.

**From your point of view, what are some of the most memorable moments in RWAV's history?**

The Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009 left a lasting memory on the staff that were involved in the emergency support work that RWAV undertook providing GP locums and coordination. The work continued for a number of years thereafter, ensuring that there was access to primary health care services in Kinglake, and culminating in the construction and opening of a new clinic to service the community.

Personally, my involvement with the recruitment of overseas trained doctors, and the opportunity in 2005 to be part of the Australian Government Opportunities Australia Expos in the United Kingdom, was rewarding. It was a chance to actively promote Australia, Victoria, and the benefits of rural general practice to a varied cohort of overseas-trained GPs – many who ended up being supported by RWAV to relocate to rural Victoria.

**How has the rural health landscape changed over time in Victoria?**

Originally, RWAV was funded to address the maldistribution of GPs, and in particular to concentrate on the recruitment of overseas-trained doctors to fill demand in rural and regional areas whilst Australia was increasing the number of doctors that it trained.

We have seen a massive increase in the domestic supply of medical graduates, but a decreasing number that are interested in, or are going into, general practice as a career, and then considering to work in rural and regional areas. There is still an important need for international medical graduates to fill the gaps in rural areas.

Other clear trends are the changing models of service delivery, the importance of multidisciplinary teams, expansion of roles for some health professionals, and the use of technology to access primary health care services, which was fast-forwarded due to COVID-19.

### **What impact do you think RWAV has made to rural health in Victoria?**

The impact has been significant both from a recruitment perspective and the delivery of services.

RWAV has been there for the last two decades to support rural practices seeking to recruit and retain GPs, and more recently in the last few years to recruit and retain nursing professionals and allied health professionals. There have been hundreds of GPs recruited by RWAV to provide necessary primary health care to rural and regional communities.

Additionally since 2002, RWAV has administered Medical Outreach Specialist Programs, expanding from a single program to now eight specific programs that target services being delivered in rural and Indigenous communities. In this financial year, 397 services were funded, enabling 3,564 visits and providing 48,580 occasions of service that rural people would not have been able to access in their local community, and would have required them to travel to access those services.

### **What innovative work is RWAV currently doing to enhance the access and quality of health care for rural Victorian communities?**

As part of our core funding agreement with the Commonwealth Department of Health, we are required to undertake an annual Health Workforce Needs Assessment which then forms the basis for the programs and services that we deliver.

Being able to utilise the health workforce data that RWAV collects, and having access to previously unavailable departmental data through the HeaDS UPP tool, has seen significant improvements in our ability to identify areas of need, and to direct resources and programs to specifically target those communities.

