



Future workforce:
Building the pipeline

Pathways to Progress: Healthcare Access in Rural Victoria

Abstract title: 'Growing our own' in southwestern Victoria: end-to-end rural pathways to health professional careers

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Deakin University's School of Medicine is committed to enhancing the wellbeing of the communities it serves, with a particular focus on our rural training footprint in the Western Victoria Primary Healthcare Network (WVPHN) where there is a significant primary care workforce shortage[1]. In 2021, only 6.5% of Victoria's general practitioners provided services in the WVPHN, with 60% of this workforce aged over 45 years, and less than one third working in more rural areas (Modified Monash 3-6) [2].

In response to community need, we are implementing innovative 'grow your own' approaches to health professional training, designed to increase access to health careers for traditionally under-represented groups, including rural students. Students from our rural footprint are prioritised for admission to the 30 places annually in our Rural Training Stream (RTS), which admitted its first cohort in 2022. Commencing next year, RTS students can complete all four years of their medical studies whilst remaining resident in their rural communities of origin. A pre-clinical blended learning program will be offered, providing weekly face-to-face learning at new rural learning campuses in Ararat (MM4) and Warrnambool (MM3). Following these pre-clinical years, students will undertake their two years of clinical training at one or more of our three rural clinical schools (RCS).

Importantly, the location and design of the RTS will strengthen students' exposure to general practice and primary health care delivery in rural communities. Deakin's ongoing work through the Western Victoria Regional Training Hub will ensure that students completing the new end-to-end RTS pathway will be well supported to transition into post-graduate training opportunities within western Victoria.

This new offering forms part of a broad program of reform already well underway, including the establishment of the Damion Drapac Centre for Equity in Health Education, and our 'Pathways to Health Careers Program'. These activities support our strategic commitment to recruit and train students who reflect the diversity of the rural communities and patients they will serve.

Our presentation will highlight the following key points:

- Presentation of a 'grow your own' workforce model within the Western Victoria PHN, commencing 2024
- Rural pathways to health careers program development
- Recruiting for diversity and widening access to health professional training.

1. Fuller L, Beattie J., Versace V., Rogers G., McGrail M., . Describing a Medical School's rural activity footprint: setting selection and workforce distribution priorities. 2023, unpublished manuscript (under review).

2. Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Data Tool [Available from: <https://hwd.health.gov.au/datatool/>].