



# Statement from RWAV on Rural Urgent and Emergency Care in Victoria

May, 2024

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) is calling on decision makers to consider new approaches to achieve better urgent and emergency healthcare for Victoria's rural communities.

The current urgent and emergency healthcare system and models in rural Victoria are unsustainable and are not meeting needs of small rural communities. People living in rural Victoria are receiving less consistent and sustainable access to urgent and emergency care. This is in part because governance systems are fragmented, and workforce shortages and skills gaps make consistent service delivery challenging. Health professionals working in rural urgent and emergency care are saying that the system is unsustainable.

**Immediate action** is needed to ensure equitable, safe and quality urgent and emergency care for small rural communities in Victoria. Key decision makers in the state government and health sector will need to:

1. Invest in new **research** to
  - a. identify effective and sustainable models of urgent and emergency care that are context appropriate to meet the needs of Victorian rural communities and locations.
  - b. determine best-practice principles that would guide establishment of both urgent and emergency care models.
2. **Establish a new advisory group which includes rural health experts and community experts** to investigate current urgent and emergency models and make recommendations for future urgent and emergency care in rural Victoria.
3. **Refine public facing definitions of urgent care and emergency settings** in Victoria to help communities understand the options and opportunities that are available to them.
4. **Establish new approaches for service level governance** to support urgent and emergency care settings.

Following this work, the state government needs to:

5. **Establish sustainable, urgent and emergency care models** that are context appropriate, effectively governed, and codesigned with the local rural community and its professional workforce using a set of predetermined and agreed guiding principles. Sustainable models must include appropriate governance arrangements (including cross boundary arrangements) and funding models which ensure appropriate workforce capacity and capability with suitable infrastructure.
6. Establish effective **telehealth** infrastructure and inter-organisational relationships to ensure effective patient care across governance boundaries. Telehealth should not be seen as the primary or default modality of service provision for urgent care. It should be used to complement and enhance the expertise of local rural clinicians and provide relief during high service provision periods to ensure workforce continuity and well-being.

RWAV is eager to work with the state government as a matter of priority to ensure people living in rural Victoria receive the most appropriate and effective urgent and emergency care when they need it most.



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### About RWAV

RWAV improves access to quality primary care health services and other health services for rural, regional and First Nations communities across Victoria. We improve health outcomes through effective and customised health workforce solutions that are informed through partnerships, workforce and population health data, and collaboration with communities.