



Impact Report

2024 / 2025

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Welcome to our Impact Report 2024–25

Acknowledgement of Country

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) acknowledges the traditional custodians of Country, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, on which our office stands, and the traditional custodians throughout Victoria where our services are delivered. We recognise their continuing care and connection to the land, waters and sky as enduring stewards across Victoria. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and respectfully acknowledge Country and Traditional Owners wherever this Impact Report is being read.

A special thank you to the talented RWAV team whose photography is featured throughout this Impact Report. Our staff live across the state, and their efforts have captured the spirit of rural and regional Victoria by showcasing the character of our stunning local landscapes.

Photo: Elmhurst, Kate Temby, Winner of the RWAV Photo Competition



Snapshot of RWAV's achievements 2024-25

Recruitment

RWAV supported **776 health professionals** transitioning into rural practice and promoted **144 primary care roles** across **103 services**, connecting providers with skilled professionals. More than **\$124,000** in relocation and retention incentives was distributed to ease these transitions and strengthen a sustainable, well-distributed rural workforce.

GP Locum health services

RWAV delivered **84 GP locum placements**, providing **2,208 sessions** across rural Victoria. To strengthen locum availability, **\$85,000** was allocated for accommodation and travel subsidies, with an additional **\$20,000** in participation incentives supporting recruitment and retention in high-need areas.

Future workforce

RWAV awarded **307 student grants** to undergraduate and postgraduate students, supporting clinical placements and exam preparation. These grants enabled students to gain practical experience, develop their skills, and advance in their health careers.

GP Programs

The Pre-Fellowship Program approved **112 applications**, with **91 doctors** actively participating and **12 awaiting placement**. **10 participants** successfully achieved program objectives by securing college pathway placements.

Allied health

The Allied Health New Service Grant funded nine practices to develop or expand services across chiropractic, speech pathology, optometry, orthoptics, physiotherapy, psychology, and social work (mental health).

Outreach programs

RWAV's outreach programs delivered **3,384 visits** across Victoria, supporting over **290 services** and reaching **47,826 patients**, including **12,767** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Regional Mental Health Workforce Incentives

Over the past three years, RWAV has secured over **\$3 million** for Area Mental Health Services and **\$870,000** for Mental Health Locals and Community Organisations, supporting the relocation of **289 mental health workers** to rural and regional Victoria. An additional **\$80,000** was invested in an international recruitment campaign to further strengthen workforce capacity.

RWAV Grants

RWAV awarded **\$2,211,892 to 1,186 applicants** through the Health Workforce Scholarship Program, supporting clinical skill development via workshops, online learning, hands-on activities, and conferences. Additionally, the Medical Professional Development Program assisted **244 doctors with over \$322,000** in grants, enabling them to expand their skills and better serve their communities.

Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census 2024

The 2024 Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census received over **724 responses**, reflecting strong engagement from the sector and representing a **24% increase** compared with the previous year. This growth highlights the increasing commitment of rural health professionals to contribute valuable data that informs workforce planning and policy development.

Photo: Gippsland tree canopy, Daniel Boland

Note of appreciation

At RWAV, we extend our sincere gratitude to the dedicated health professionals working across rural and regional Victoria. Your tireless commitment, passion for excellence and resilience form a pillar of community care, and your impact reaches far beyond the clinic walls. Every day, your work uplifts lives, strengthens communities and inspires those around you. We are proud to stand beside you, supporting, advocating and celebrating your vital contribution to the health and wellbeing of rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians.

We also acknowledge and thank our valued funders, the Australian and Victorian governments, whose continued support makes RWAV's work possible. Their partnership enables us to help ensure equitable access to healthcare for communities across the state.



The RWAV approach to solving the healthcare challenge

Working in rural and regional Victoria offers an unmatched balance of career opportunity and lifestyle. Healthcare professionals enjoy a strong sense of purpose and community connection while being surrounded by breathtaking landscapes, fresh air, and open spaces. It's a place where children can grow up close to nature, where neighbours know each other by name, and where rewarding careers in healthcare are abundant across diverse and welcoming communities.

Despite these advantages, health outcomes in rural and regional Victoria continue to lag behind those in metropolitan areas. Communities in these regions experience disproportionately higher rates of chronic disease, mental health conditions and lifestyle-related illnesses. Rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations and avoidable deaths are also significantly higher than in major cities, reflecting longstanding inequities in access to timely, appropriate and coordinated care.

These disparities are influenced by a range of factors, including workforce shortages, geographic isolation, limited availability of specialised services and socioeconomic disadvantage.

This is observed in rates of chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, suicide and self-inflicted injuries, and type 2 diabetes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

Several factors contribute to these disparities:

- Long distances to healthcare facilities can impede and delay access to essential medical services, contributing to late diagnosis and poorer outcomes.
- A chronic shortage and an often higher turnover rate of healthcare professionals in rural areas leads to gaps in service delivery and poorer continuity of care for patients.
- A lack of suitable accommodation in rural areas, as well as fewer options for partner employment and education/childcare for children, are significant contributors to workforce shortages.
- Rural communities often face higher levels of poverty and limited access to health promotion, health education and illness prevention resources, including screening.
- Rural areas often lack the funding and infrastructure necessary to support comprehensive healthcare services, such as hospitals and specialised clinics.

- Rural and regional communities often contain vulnerable populations including First Nations communities, refugees, migrants and seasonal international workers, with varied cultural and language barriers to accessing appropriate care.
- Reduced access to reliable internet can impede remote consultations and healthcare which could otherwise partly address workforce shortages.

Achieving equitable health outcomes for all Victorians requires sustained investment, collaboration and strong leadership. For over 27 years, RWAV has played a pivotal role in strengthening rural healthcare through targeted workforce programs that attract, support, and retain healthcare professionals across Victoria.



Photo: Healesville, Evaan Rabel

With 1.6 million people relying on rural and regional health services, RWAV continues to take a proactive and strategic approach to addressing challenges that rural health professionals face each day.

Our strength lies in partnering directly with local communities and health services to co-design culturally safe, place-based solutions that reflect each region's unique needs and strengths. Through recruitment incentives, professional development pathways, a wide range of grants and peer-support initiatives, we are not only filling positions but building resilient, sustainable health teams equipped to deliver high-quality care where it is needed most.

RWAV also plays a vital leadership role in championing rural voices. By fostering collaboration with health organisations, amplifying practitioner perspectives and aligning on data-driven insights, we ensure rural workforce priorities remain central to state and national health agendas.

Looking ahead, the development of our 2026–30 Strategic Plan marks a new chapter of innovation and impact, one that reinforces our commitment to equitable, accessible primary care and outlines the partnerships, investments, and system-wide actions needed to secure a strong foundation of a thriving rural health workforce for generations to come.

Reference: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024, April). Rural and Remote Health. Australia.

About us

RWAV is dedicated to supporting the delivery of quality healthcare to rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Victoria. Established in 1997, we are a leading non-profit organisation committed to ensuring that all Victorians have access to quality health services. We support the achievement of equitable health and wellbeing outcomes, regardless of a community's location. We have a clear mission to provide tailored, effective health workforce solutions that meet the unique needs of the communities we serve.

We deliver sustainable health workforce solutions through recruitment, locum services, and outreach and grant programs, addressing immediate workforce shortages while building a foundation for long-term healthcare system improvements.

Our initiatives are informed by strategic partnerships and rigorous workforce and population health data, and aimed at developing and maintaining a high-quality, well-distributed health workforce, ensuring that even the most rural communities receive the care they need.

Photo: RWAV Team, Board and Leaders at the RWAV Conference 2025



Our vision is a future where every Victorian community is supported by a robust health workforce, leading to improved and sustainable health and wellbeing outcomes for all. Through our commitment to excellence, innovation and collaboration, RWAV continues to make inroads in healthcare delivery in rural and regional Victoria, ensuring that no community is left behind.



RWAV's 2023–25 Strategic Plan Goals

- 1.** Promote the benefits of working in rural healthcare, RWAV's unique workforce support offerings and ability to assist with expertise on health workforce issues and solutions.
- 2.** Strengthen our recruitment and workforce support programs so the communities we care for have fairer access to an effective and sustainable health workforce.
- 3.** Facilitate rural place-based health workforce solutions which cater to the unique health and health workforce needs of communities, and aim to increase workforce access, quality and retention within the area.
- 4.** Strengthen engagement with First Nations healthcare stakeholders to support initiatives that enhance access to culturally safe healthcare.
- 5.** Increase advocacy and collaboration to contribute positively to healthcare reform with others.
- 6.** Strengthen data and research capabilities to tell the story of the health workforce, drive change, and enhance our ability to provide evidence-based expertise on health workforce issues and solutions.
- 7.** Be a great organisation supporting rural health by optimising our governance and operations so we can focus on our work goals and always think about those we serve.
- 8.** Find new funding channels to support health workforce initiatives that benefit communities and progress RWAV's purpose.

Message from our Chair



Having been on the RWAV Board for a number of years and having worked to support rural and regional health services, I have witnessed first-hand the extensive experience and tireless work that RWAV dedicates to attracting and sustaining a high-quality rural and regional primary healthcare workforce. We do this from an unwavering commitment to ensuring better health for rural, regional and First Nations communities, so that Victorians can experience equitable outcomes, regardless of where they live.

I would like to thank my Board colleagues, CEO Lauren Cordwell, her management team and all our terrific staff, for their continued efforts and many achievements. I would like to especially note and thank Adjunct Associate Professor Morton Rawlin AM, our previous Board Chair, for his experienced and strong leadership and significant contributions over a very long period. The past year has seen much change, including a new Constitution for RWAV. Our constitutional change will help to position RWAV for a future in which we will need to be a different organisation – committed to our core roles, but willing to adapt to ensure that we can meet the needs of those we serve.

In keeping with this ambition, we have embarked on a significant uplift in engagement with government, policy makers, and rural and regional communities, practitioners and services across the state. We do this to better understand and address our immensely complex healthcare system and policy landscape, to provide programs and reform proposals that are truly embedded in what is occurring on the ground, and in what is needed, throughout Victoria.

Engagement and innovation are key to addressing the challenges we face. There are many policy, governance and funding reforms, both announced and anticipated, that demand of us agility, flexibility and creativity.

Our relationships with our stakeholders are critical to our success, and we commit to being a great organisation to partner with as we work together to improve healthcare in rural and regional Victoria.

I look forward to continuing to work with my Board colleagues, our staff and our partners as we step into the future with a new Strategic Plan in 2026. This plan will provide refreshed foundations for continuing our significant progress and help ensure that RWAV is always relevant and always helping.

The achievements outlined in this report are a testament to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved in RWAV's work, and I warmly thank all who have contributed for their passion and commitment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Phelps', with a stylized, flowing script.

Professor Grant Phelps

Board Chair

Message from our CEO



I am proud to lead RWAV, which since 1997 has worked with dedication and passion to deliver practical healthcare workforce solutions that have real impact for communities throughout Victoria. A belief in health equity for all Victorians strongly underpins all of this work.

This report provides insights into the wide range of programs and direct supports RWAV provides, highlighting many achievements over the past year that demonstrate the extensive experience and commitment of the RWAV team.

The report also highlights how RWAV has continued to grow as an organisation, securing increased funding to enable greater impact, increased engagement and strengthened partnerships to address health equity and workforce distribution.

As we begin work on our new Strategic Plan, which will be released in the first half of 2026, we will continue to engage broadly to understand community and practitioner needs in greater depth, anticipate future challenges, and position RWAV to continue to have a significant impact on an increasingly complex health system.

Recently, we moved into a new and improved office and have undertaken substantial improvements to our technology infrastructure. We have also approved a new Enterprise Agreement for employees as we continue to work towards being an employer of choice.

I thank the RWAV Board, management and all staff for their tireless work. I thank our many stakeholders for their partnership and shared commitment and thank the Australian and Victorian governments for their important funding support.

I continue to be inspired by the commitment and resilience of our healthcare workforce.

Rural Victoria is a great place to live and work. At RWAV, we are committed to working together to ensure people living in rural communities receive the healthcare they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Lauren Cordwell

CEO

Bringing healthcare to communities

Recognising the ongoing workforce pressures in regional healthcare, RWAV is driving solutions that promote long-term stability. Our recruitment efforts are strategically aligned with the evolving needs of rural communities, ensuring meaningful and lasting impact. Through tailored recruitment, career guidance and targeted incentive programs, we continue to deliver on our mission to build a sustainable rural and regional health workforce across Victoria, connecting health professionals with the communities that need them most.

RWAV provided career guidance to 776 health professionals, supporting their transition into rural practice. We promoted 144 primary care opportunities across 103 healthcare services, showcasing the breadth of rural career pathways and linking providers with skilled professionals.

During 2024-25, 44 health professionals were placed into ongoing roles across rural and regional Victoria, contributing to long-term workforce stability.

- 33 of these placements were doctors in general practice roles.
- 11 were allied health and nursing professionals securing ongoing positions.
- 40 were placed in priority towns identified through RWAV's Health Workforce Needs Assessment.
- 29 were placed in towns classified as Modified Monash Model (MMM) 4 or above, highlighting RWAV's continued focus on the most rural communities.
- 5 were placed in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), supporting culturally safe, community-led care.

Our recruitment services offer a seamless and cost-free experience for healthcare providers, considering each candidate's skills, cultural needs, family situation and career aspirations to ensure the right fit for each community. Our engagement continues beyond placement, helping health professionals successfully integrate into their new environment.

More than \$124,000 in relocation and retention incentives was distributed to support this transition, easing the move into rural career opportunities and reinforcing our commitment to a sustainable, equitably distributed workforce.

Table 1: Recruitment highlights

776	RWAV provided career guidance to 776 health professionals, supporting their transition into rural practice
33	placements of doctors in general practice roles
11	allied health and nursing professionals securing ongoing positions
40	were placed in priority towns identified through RWAV's Health Workforce Needs Assessment
29	placed in towns classified as MMM4 or above
5	placed in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), supporting culturally safe, community-led care



Photo: Walking trail, Gippsland, Daniel Boland

Insights from the frontline

Alex Ross

Podiatrist, Sunraysia Community Health Service (SCHS), Mildura

'Relocating my young family from Tasmania to Mildura was a big task. The RWAV relocation incentive helped ease some of the financial burden of relocating from Tasmania to the mainland and enabled us to choose the journeys that were going to best suit the family in our 1,200 km relocation,' Alex says.

Since settling in Mildura, Alex has joined the SCHS community health podiatry team, where his role has helped reduce wait times and improve access for local patients.

One story that stood out was helping a young primary school student with an ingrown toenail that was stopping him from playing cricket. 'We coordinated a plan to have a portion of his toenail removed permanently during the Christmas break so he wouldn't miss a game,' Alex says.

Yoshani Binushika

Physiotherapist, Corio Bay Sports Treatment Clinic, Colac

'Working in a regional area is fantastic,' Yoshani says. 'We get to work with all different cases and have the opportunity to do various things, including pilates, the GLA:D program, balance exercises and manual therapy.'

Since joining the team at Corio Bay Sports Treatment Clinic in Colac, Yoshani has gained experience across a wide range of patient types. 'In Colac, we work with TAC, EPC, WorkCover and private patients, which helps me feel more confident working in any setting,' she says.

Relocating to Colac has come with its challenges, particularly around childcare access, but RWAV's support has made a meaningful difference. 'The relocation and retention incentive helps to pay the rent,' Yoshani says.

Dr Andrew Cameron

Chiropractor and Director, n8 Health Group, Bendigo

Bendigo chiropractor Andrew is helping fill critical gaps in rural healthcare by flying himself to Birchip every fortnight to provide essential allied health services in a town with only one GP.

'Up north there, even as a kid, I saw what they're up against,' he said. 'So, it was always a goal of mine to try and service those areas in some way.' Despite funding limitations, he continues to personally cover the costs of his trips.

The need for healthcare in Birchip still remains critical. 'We have poorer services there now than even 10 years ago,' Andrew says. 'It's a third world up there. They're asking people with potential dementia to drive 2 or 3 hours on those roads to get an appointment in 6 months' time in Ballarat. It's barbaric.'

To support Cameron's ongoing efforts, RWAV has provided recruitment support to help grow allied health capacity at his clinic, N8 Health. Over the past 2 financial years, RWAV has assisted with advertising vacant roles, identifying potential candidates, and offering guidance on the sponsorship and migration process, particularly important in hard-to-fill roles like podiatry.



Scan here to view the video by Bendigo Advertiser.

<https://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/video/local/x8vpjz8/chiropractor-andrew-cameron-wants-to-fly-other-healthcare-professionals-to-birchip/?dmplayersource=share-send>

Photo: Dr Andrew Cameron with his aircraft.

Photo courtesy of Dr Andrew Cameron, © Bendigo Advertiser



Fiona Maskell

Principal Physiotherapist, Cobden Physio, Cobden

Cobden Physio was established in 2014 with the expectation of just one day of work per week, but Principal Physiotherapist, Fiona, soon realised demand was far greater, quickly exceeding what a single practitioner could manage.

Ten years on, Cobden Physio has expanded to meet local demand, offering some capacity for new patients at short notice. While challenges remain, such as limited access to occupational therapy, speech pathology and podiatry, the clinic has invested in larger facilities with the vision of enabling other allied health practitioners to provide services to the community.

The last two years have finally seen an increase in our own staff numbers, with local physio Nikki joining Fiona, and more recently, Manisha, who was supported by an RWAV grant for relocation to the area.

**Dr Idris Sonmez**

General Practitioner, Longwarry Medical Centre, Longwarry

Dr Idris Sonmez, an international medical graduate (IMG) working at Longwarry Medical Centre, expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable assistance RWAV provided in helping him secure a GP position in Victoria.

'The process of transitioning as an international medical graduate can be challenging, but RWAV's guidance made it significantly smoother and more encouraging. I look forward to the opportunities ahead and to making a positive contribution to healthcare in Victoria,' he says.

Photo: Dr Idris Sonmez, GP at Longwarry Medical Centre with James Cousins, Program Coordinator Recruitment at RWAV.



Maintaining the locum workforce

With rural communities under increasing strain from GP shortages, RWAV's Locum Program provides a targeted, responsive solution.

Funded by the Australian and Victorian governments, RWAV's GP Locum Program continues to be a vital solution to maintaining service continuity in rural and regional healthcare. The program is designed to relieve pressure on the permanent workforce by placing short-term GP locums across general practices, community health services and ACCHOs, as well as in aged care settings, on hospital ward rounds and for emergency department on-call duties.

Two streams of locums are supported through the program:

- employed locums, contracted casually by RWAV
- brokerage locums, who operate independently and contract directly with practices.

This flexible model ensures that locum support is tailored to meet the specific needs of both clinicians and healthcare providers.

RWAV delivers a comprehensive recruitment service at no cost to practices. This includes managing administrative processes, facilitating credentialing and Medicare provider numbers, preparing vacancy briefs and offering personalised placement coordination. These wraparound services are key to enabling seamless transitions into rural practices and reducing the administrative burden on already-stretched clinics.

To alleviate the costs associated with locum support, RWAV provided \$85,000 in subsidies to cover accommodation and travel expenses. A further \$20,000 in new participation incentives was distributed to attract and retain a strong locum workforce, particularly in locations facing persistent shortages.

Locum demand remains consistently high, especially during peak holiday periods, yet the shrinking number of available GPs and the complexity of rural workloads, including hospital on-call responsibilities, continues to challenge locum recruitment efforts. RWAV's investment in subsidies, incentives and tailored support is helping to mitigate these pressures, ensuring rural communities have reliable access to the healthcare services they need.

Table 2: Locum health services key achievements
1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025

GP locum placements delivered:	84
GP locum sessions provided across Victoria:	2,208
GP locum sessions delivered specifically to ACCHOs:	254 sessions
GP locum opportunities promoted:	111 across 39 general practices
GP locum sessions delivered in MMM 4+ locations:	2,090 sessions through 79 of the 84 locum placements
Financial subsidies for accommodation and travel expenses:	\$85,000
New locum incentives distributed:	\$20,000

Dr James Choong

Locum General Practitioner

Dr James Choong, a GP of 43 years, was first recruited by RWAV in 2000, spending 7 years in Clunes and Creswick before leading a team of 24 GPs in Ballarat for 16 years. Following his retirement, he returned to RWAV to take up rural relief locum work, providing care across communities including Paynesville, Halls Gap, Ararat, Beechworth, Heywood and Apollo Bay. With RWAV's support, he now enjoys the flexibility to choose where, when and for how long he works.

Travelling with his wife, Leanne, his experience has been deeply rewarding. 'I have been doing relief locum work for 18 months now and have seen places I would not normally visit. I get paid and am provided with fully self-contained accommodation for the duration. The towns are grateful to have a doctor and show their appreciation with their warm hospitality,' Dr Choong says.

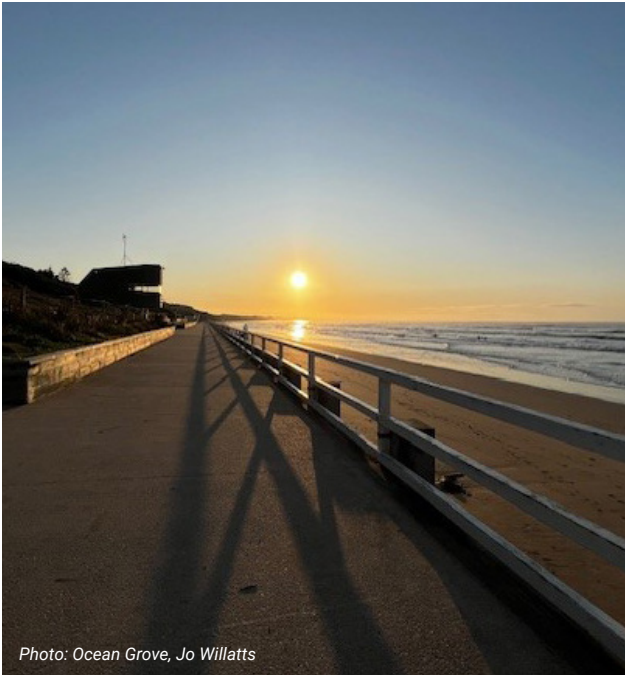


Photo: Ocean Grove, Jo Willatts

Supportive GP Programs

The Pre-Fellowship Program (PFP)

The PFP was announced as part of the Australian Government's 2023–24 Budget Strengthening Medicare Initiative. This program provides non-vocationally recognised (non-VR) doctors with valuable general practice experience before joining a general practitioner (GP) college-led fellowship pathway with either the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) or the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) while working in primary care.

During 2024–25, the GP Programs team:

- processed 156 applications
- approved 112 applications
- saw 91 doctors actively participate with an additional 12 approved doctors waiting to commence in practice
- saw 10 doctors successfully meet the objectives of the program by obtaining a college pathway placement.

Table 3: PFP highlights 2024–25

156 Processed applications

112 Approved applications

10 Doctors successfully met the objectives of the program by obtaining a college pathway placement

91 Doctors actively participate with an additional 12 approved doctors waiting to commence in practice

The 5-Year International Medical Graduate (IMG) Recruitment Scheme

This scheme supports the recruitment of experienced IMGs and Foreign Graduates of Accredited Medical Schools into rural and remote areas, helping to address critical GP shortages in underserved communities.

Currently, 7 doctors are engaged through this scheme. Increasing awareness among practices and eligible doctors will remain a key focus to expand participation and maximise its impact.

Dr Asma Akther

GP, Mildura

Asma, an IMG from Bangladesh, now provides primary care in Mildura after connecting with RWAV's recruitment, workforce development and outreach programs.

Now part of RWAV's PFP, Asma has also accessed grant support to attend conferences and grow professionally. 'RWAV's support has been instrumental in helping me settle into rural practice and grow in my role,' says Asma.



Dr Hugo Stephenson

GP, Goldfields Medical Hub, Castlemaine

After decades leading clinical trials and health tech companies worldwide, Hugo returned to patient care in regional Victoria through RWAV's Pre-Fellowship Program, which supports experienced doctors re-entering rural general practice.

'The PFP gave me a low-barrier way to reconnect with patient care and test my readiness to return to general practice,' Hugo says. 'And the team at Goldfields couldn't have been more welcoming.'

Through the RWAV-supported placement at Goldfields Medical Hub, Hugo regained clinical confidence and rediscovered his passion for general practice. He has since joined the Fellowship Support Program and is working towards fellowship while continuing to practise part-time.



Photos: Blairgowrie, Cathy Mitton



Photos: Lake Nagambie, Jo Willatts

Delivering essential outreach care

RWAV’s outreach programs deliver essential healthcare services, including maternal health, chronic disease management, mental health, and eye and ear care, to rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria. These programs close critical gaps in access, improving health outcomes and strengthening community wellbeing. By bringing health professionals directly to these regions, RWAV ensures equitable care while reducing the financial burden on practitioners. For many, outreach services are the only way to access this kind of care.

RWAV currently manages over 290 outreach services that deliver specialised healthcare and wellbeing support to rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria (Figure 1). The programs cover travel, accommodation, meals, room hire and administrative costs, easing the burden on healthcare professionals and enabling the delivery of vital services.

The outreach programs completed 3,384 visits across Victoria. These programs addressed a wide spectrum of healthcare needs, representing 37 health disciplines (Figure 4).

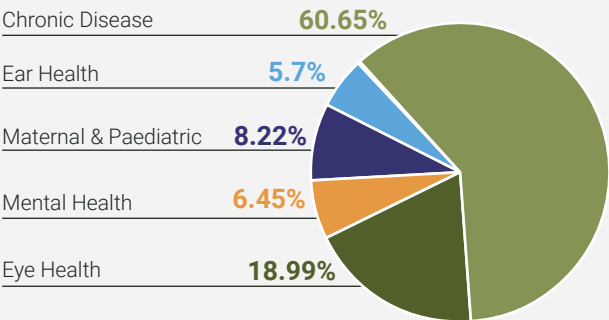
Figure 1: RWAV-administered outreach programs for 2024–25

RWAV administered the following outreach programs:

-  **Coordination of Indigenous Eye Health (CIEH)**
-  **Ear Health Coordination Eye and Ear Surgical Support (EESS)**
-  **Healthy Ears – Better Hearing Better Listening Program (HEBHL)**
-  **Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program (MOICDP)**
-  **Rural Health Outreach Fund (RHOF)**
-  **Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS)**

Funding was primarily directed towards chronic disease, mental health, maternal and paediatric care, and eye and ear health (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage funding spent across all health disciplines



Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Our outreach services supported 47,826 patients across regional and rural Victoria, including 12,767 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Figure 3). These figures reflect RWAV’s strong commitment to improving healthcare access and outcomes for First Nations communities.

Figure 3: Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients seen by outreach services

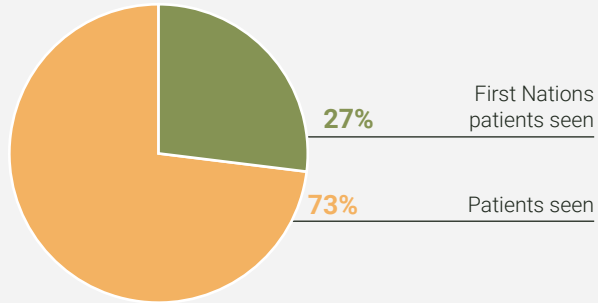


Figure 4: Percentage of funding spent in different healthcare areas



Frontline Journeys

Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program (MOICDP)

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is increasing its positive impact, thanks to visiting ophthalmologist, Dr Ahmed Suheb, supported by MOICDP Ophthalmology expansion funding provided through RWAV. This initiative enables Ahmed to prioritise Aboriginal patients, offering bulk-billed eye care and surgery.

Many patients, who previously had to make 8–10-hour return journeys to Melbourne for specialist care, can now receive treatment close to home.

Lance*, from Orbost, used to make monthly trips to Pakenham, an exhausting 10-hour round journey, made even harder by other health conditions. Now, thanks to the visiting service and support from the local ACCHO, he only travels 90 minutes and receives the care he needs locally.

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service's patients say the outreach service has helped ease the stress and financial strain of accessing ophthalmology care.

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service, Bairnsdale

Rural Health Outreach Fund (RHOF)

For years, Mark*, a Torres Strait Islander patient, battled diabetes-related complications, including severe macular swelling threatening his central vision. Left untreated, it could lead to permanent loss of central vision.

Dr Roland Bunting, an ophthalmologist travelling to Warrnambool regularly with the support of RWAV's RHOF program, cared for Mark over several years to preserve his sight.

In 2024, a new generation of injection therapy delivered unexpectedly strong results, allowing Mark to retain driving vision and maintain his daily independence.

'We are optimistic about the possibility of stretching his treatments further, or perhaps even ending them altogether. This is the promise of progress in medical science, the ability to restore not just sight, but also dignity and quality of life. For me, travelling to Warrnambool to provide this care is both a professional commitment and a deeply personal mission,' Roland says.

Dr Roland Bunting, Ophthalmologist, Warrnambool

**Patient names changed to protect privacy.*

Eye and Ear Surgical Support (EESS) program

Isabell*, aged 4 years, from Echuca, faced significant health challenges from a young age, including ongoing ear infections that led to bilateral hearing loss. Diagnosed with ADHD and ASD, Isabell encountered difficulties with learning and speech development.

Thanks to the support of Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, Isabell was able to access RWAV's EESS program, which assisted her to receive surgery through the private pathway.

After the surgery, Isabell's family observed a remarkable improvement in her speech and overall development.

Jackie Giles, Aboriginal Health Support Worker

Healthy Ears – Better Hearing Better Listening program

Tabby*, aged 3 years, accompanied by her father, engaged with the outreach service, Noah's Ark Speech Pathology, to access speech pathology support for the first time. At the time of referral, Tabby was not using verbal language to communicate, instead relying heavily on gestures and vocalisations.

The outreach service played a crucial role in bridging this gap, introducing the family to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), connecting them with funding pathways and equipping them with evidence-based communication strategies.

The impact has been significant. The family is now actively engaged in the NDIS process and positioned to access the funding and supports Tabby needs for long-term developmental gains.

Millie Joice, Noah's Ark Speech Pathology, Echuca

Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS)

Ali Abud, a Deakin University optometry student, gained valuable experience in outreach services through his placement at Lorne Community Hospital. The eye care clinic allows students to work alongside qualified optometrists to consult with patients and manage various eye conditions.

A memorable case involved managing a patient with persistent dry eye disease, highlighting how continuity of care and simple interventions can greatly improve quality of life in regional areas.

'I gained an enriching experience and knowledge of collaborative rural health by having access to liaisons with doctors, exercise physiologists and other health professionals. This exposure has strengthened my clinical and interpersonal skills while encouraging myself and my peers to consider pursuing a career in rural health upon graduation,' Ali says.

Ali Abud, Optometry student, Great Ocean Road Health, Lorne

Dr Deborah Amott

ENT surgeon and Director,
ENT North

Dr Deborah Amott is an experienced ENT surgeon who has delivered care across rural and regional Victoria, including Albury–Wodonga, Warrnambool, Gisborne and Bendigo. Passionate about improving health outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, she provides outreach ENT services through the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative.

'You can take these kids, do a very simple operation on them, often just 10 to 15 minutes' worth of surgery, and it changes the trajectory of their lives, which is really pretty fabulous,' Dr Amott says.

RWAV has been essential, not just in helping coordinate the role, but also in providing the funding that makes the service sustainable and free for families who might otherwise go without care. The partnership enables her to reach patients in need while maintaining a strong connection to the rural communities she values deeply.

Reference: Maher A (host) (October 2024), 'Exploring rural healthcare with Dr Deborah Amott' [podcast], Talking country health, RWAV.



Listen to the full podcast on Dr Deborah Amott.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/podcasts/talking-country-health-exploring-rural-healthcare-with-dr-deborah-amott/>

Partnering with Connecting the Docs

RWAV is proud to collaborate on Connecting the Docs, a grassroots initiative redefining how doctors are supported to live and thrive in rural and regional communities across Victoria.

Launched in the Loddon Mallee region in 2022, Connecting the Docs was developed in response to local doctors' feedback about the challenges of navigating rural health systems. The program offers more than recruitment; it is about belonging, mentorship, connection and clear career pathways. It supports doctors and their families to feel genuinely welcomed and integrated into community life, helping to build a sustainable and committed rural medical workforce.

In April 2025, RWAV supported the Connecting the Docs Regional Round-Up held in Swan Hill, an inspiring and impactful event that brought together junior doctors, medical students, supervisors, health leaders and families to explore the professional and lifestyle opportunities of rural practice. Our CEO, Lauren Cordwell, was delighted to speak at the event, which showcased the power of connection, collaboration and community in shaping the future of regional healthcare.

The event marked a milestone, with growing interest from health services across the state. As more communities embrace this model, Connecting the Docs continues to transform how doctors are recruited, retained and, most importantly, how they belong.

Strengthening Rural Healthcare with a Community Navigator

RWAV is launching a Community Navigator program to support GPs, locums, and Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs) relocating to rural Victoria through the new fast-track pathway.

In partnership with Connecting the Docs, the Navigator will help doctors and their families settle into communities by providing support with housing, schooling, cultural integration, and local connections. Inspired by the success of the Victorian Regional Mental Health Workforce Incentive Program, it aims to ensure smooth transitions and long-term retention.

By bridging recruitment and settlement, the program will strengthen the rural healthcare workforce and deliver lasting benefits for regional communities.

Photo Left: (L-R) Kellie Byron-Gray, CEO, Kerang District Health; A/Prof Rex Pais Prabhu PSM, CMO, Bendigo Health and the Loddon Mallee Health Network; and Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV.



Photo below (L-R): Dr Annemarie Newth, Chief Medical Officer, Executive Director Medical Services, Echuca Regional Health; Dr Kate Schultz, Director of Clinical Training, Echuca Regional Health; John Bray, Project Lead GP Workforce Planning and Prioritisation, Murray PHN; Carla Taylor, CEO, General Practice Supervision Australia; Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Kellie Byron-Gray, CEO, Kerang District Health; Nerida Hyett, Senior Manager Planning, Projects and Insights, Murray PHN; and Trevor Adem, CEO, East Wimmera Health Service.



Scan for more on the Connecting the Docs program.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/connecting-the-docs-regional-round-up-in-swan-hill/>



Photo: Noojee Truss Bridge, Daniel Boland

Supporting allied healthcare where it's needed

Allied health professionals play a critical role in delivering essential healthcare services across rural and regional Victoria. Their expertise underpins preventive care, facilitates effective rehabilitation and supports the long-term management of chronic conditions. In 2024–25, RWAV supported the allied health workforce by attracting and retaining skilled practitioners, and improving access to services in rural communities.

Allied Health New Service Grant

The Allied Health New Service Grant, funded by RWAV as part of the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's Rural Health Workforce Support program, supports allied health practitioners to establish or expand services in rural and regional Victoria.

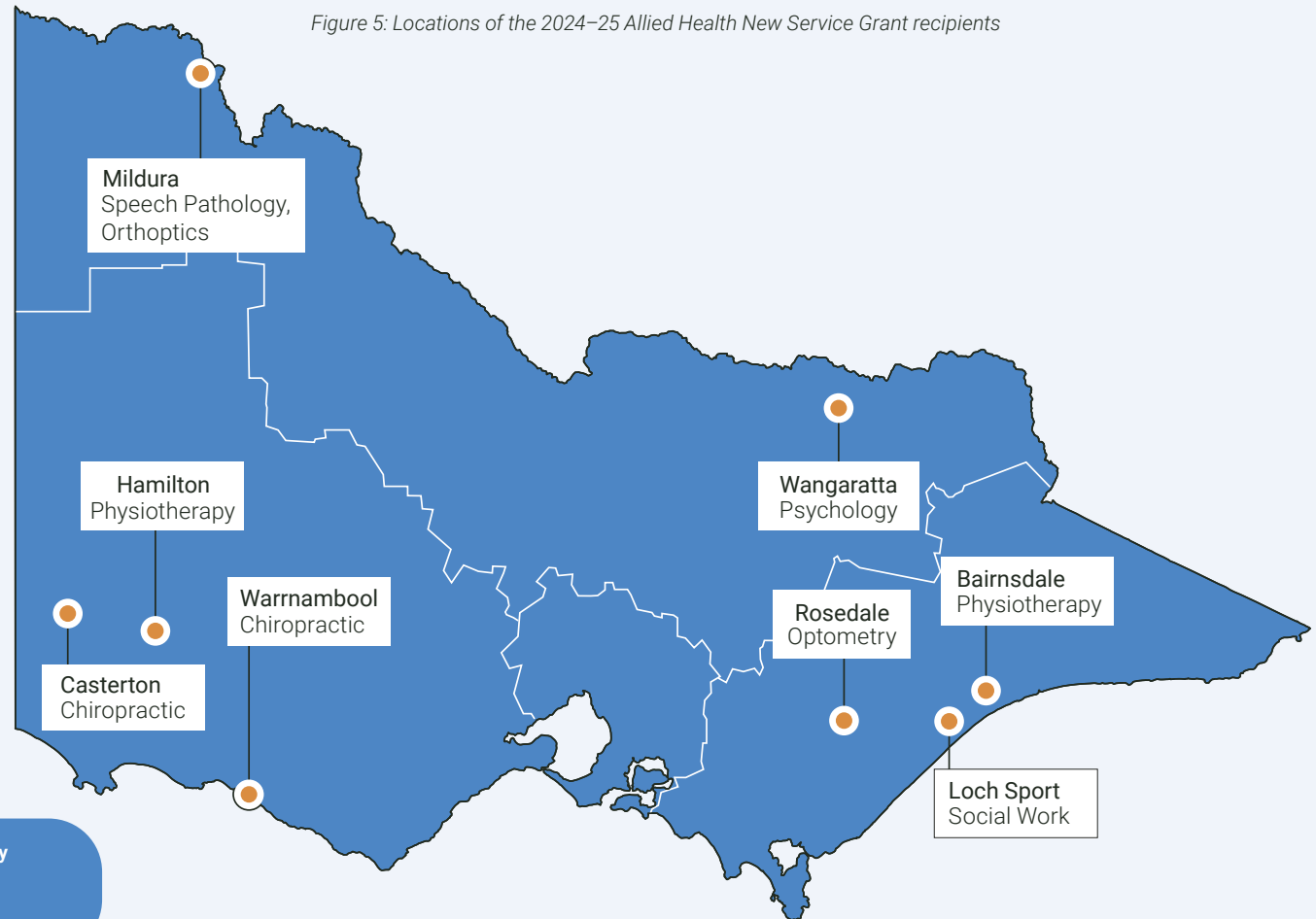
The grant provides up to \$10,000 per practice towards allied health service development or expansion for eligible allied health professions in MMM 3–7 locations in Victoria, and for activities undertaken at Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in MMM 1–7 locations in Victoria.

Applications were assessed by an RWAV panel based on eligibility, Health Workforce Needs Assessment, demand, implementation viability, increased FTE or patient capacity and geographic distribution.

In 2024–25, 72 applications requested over \$538,000 in funds.

Nine applicants were successfully awarded grant funding with selected recipients from the following allied health disciplines: chiropractic, speech pathology, optometry, orthoptics, physiotherapy, psychology and social work (mental health).

Figure 5: Locations of the 2024–25 Allied Health New Service Grant recipients



'My experience was excellent ... I have already had feedback from the community who are looking forward to using this service, even though I haven't advertised yet!'

'The patients who have been referred from the triage team at the Royal Children's Hospital are grateful they don't have to travel for appointments.'

'As of yesterday, I was able to support 4 extra patients in one week. Next week I am supporting an extra 2 patients with capacity to add another 2 or 3.'

'The grant has enabled me to set up and provide bulk-billed eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy to clients confidently. This is a therapy that is vital to support clients who have experienced trauma. I have clients who see me from the wider region, up to 75 km away.'

Allied Health New Service Grant

Through the 2024–25 Allied Health New Service Grant, Alan was able to purchase a specialised Lloyd 402 chiropractic table to help treat chronic lower back pain, disc bulges and arthritic conditions through traction and flexion.

‘It would have been a 2-hour round trip had this facility not been made available to the Casterton community with help from RWAV,’ Alan says.

The new equipment is already making a difference. Five additional patients access care locally each week, saving the community an estimated 10 hours in lost work time weekly.

Dr Alan Clarence, Chiropractor and Director, Hamilton Spinal Sports and Wellbeing, Casterton



Photo above: Dr Alan Clarence, Director of Hamilton Spinal Sports and Wellbeing in Casterton, treating a patient using the chiropractic table purchased with the support from the Allied Health New Service Grant.



Photo: Chiropractic table in use at Dobson Chiropractic and Myotherapy, purchased with the support of the Allied Health New Service Grant.

Allied Health New Service Grant

Rosedale Vision Care has been using a new visual field machine, purchased with the support of an Allied Health New Service Grant, to screen, detect and manage glaucoma and other optic nerve diseases.

‘It has also allowed us to do VicRoads vision assessments locally, saving locals a round trip of 60 km to have the same tests,’ Optometrist, Dr Sumit Shevade, says.

Dr Sumit Shevade, Optometrist, Rosedale Vision Care, Rosedale



Photo above: Dr Sumit Shevade, Optometrist, with the new visual field machine at Rosedale Vision Care, purchased with the support of the Allied Health New Service Grant.



Photo: Equipment at Sunraysia Eye Therapy, purchased with the support of the Allied Health New Service Grant.

Allied Health and Nursing Upskilling Grant

The Allied Health and Nursing Upskilling Grant supports allied health and nursing professionals working in a regional centre (MMM 2 location) with grants of up to \$1,000 for professional development.

In 2024–25, RWAV received 85 applications and awarded 35 grants totalling \$24,994 through the Allied Health and Nursing Upskilling Grant. Training covered a wide range of disciplines and included activities such as advanced pelvic floor training, eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing, dry needling, wound management and fundamentals of hand therapy.



Scan to view the RWAV Statement on National Allied Health Workforce Strategy.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/RWAVs-Statement-on-National-Allied-Health-Workforce-Strategy.pdf>

For more on RWAV’s allied health advocacy efforts, view page 40.

Photo: St Arnaud Silo Art, Dr Lee Barclay



Addressing mental health workforce shortages

The Mental Health Rural Workforce Incentives Program was established in response to the Victorian Mental Health Royal Commission to address workforce shortages in regional and rural areas and improve local mental health outcomes. Since its launch, the program has provided direct funding to support Mental Health Clinicians, Alcohol and Other Drug workers, and Lived Experience professionals relocating to fill roles in the public and non-profit mental health sectors. Each region also benefited from a dedicated Mental Health Navigator, who supported new staff with relocation, helping them find housing, schools and local community connections.

The program's impact extends through various initiatives, including funding for accommodation, referral incentives, job fairs and recruitment campaigns. Notably, the program's success led to its expansion to support Mental Health Locals, prioritising consumer-driven mental health services through a collaborative approach involving non-profit organisations and the Area Mental Health Services.

Over the past 3 years, RWAV secured over \$3 million in funding agreements for Area Mental Health Services and an additional \$870,000 for Mental Health Locals and Community Organisations. The program has facilitated 289 relocations of mental health workers to regional and rural Victoria, significantly enhancing workforce capacity in these areas. RWAV's strategic partnerships have also resulted in innovative attraction campaigns adopted by the majority of Area Mental Health Services, maximising resources to promote mental health roles regionally.

A further \$80,000 was invested to support an international recruitment campaign earlier in the year, which contributed to significant staff acquisitions, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in addressing rural staffing shortages. Our proactive engagement with the Victorian Department of Health has strengthened this success.

Despite widespread enthusiasm and high staff recruitment rates, the Victorian Department of Health has confirmed that funding will conclude on 30 June 2025.

Table 4: 2024–25 Key Achievements

\$870,000	secured for Mental Health Locals and Community Organisations
\$3M	secured in funding agreements for Area Mental Health Services



289

relocations of mental
health workers to regional
and rural Victoria

\$80,000

invested to support
an international
recruitment campaign

Darren Riggon

Senior Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner,
Mildura Base Public Hospital

Darren has built purpose and community in Mildura with support from RWAV's Mental Health Rural Workforce Incentives Program.

'RWAV has helped make this move both practical and rewarding,' Darren says.

Since relocating, he has received assistance through RWAV with moving and travel expenses, as well as support for continuing professional development (CPD). Drawing on over 30 years' experience in acute psychiatry, community care, education and leadership, he now works at Mildura Base Public Hospital and runs a hybrid psychotherapy practice. He also provides clinical supervision and mentoring for other practitioners.

Reference: Mayer A (host) (2025) 'From London to Mildura: Darren Riggon's mission to deliver purposeful mental health care in rural Victoria' [podcast], Talking country health, RWAV.



Scan to listen to the full story on
Darren's move to rural Victoria on
RWAV's Talking Country Health
podcast.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/podcasts/>



Investing in our future workforce

We aim for a sustainable and future-focused rural health workforce by investing in innovative strategies, partnerships and capacity-building initiatives that strengthen workforce pipelines.

In 2024–25, RWAV awarded 307 student grants in total, offering meaningful support to secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate students (Figure 6). These grants assisted with clinical placements and exam preparation, helping students build their skills, gain practical experience, and progress in their health careers.

Figure 6: Distribution of Future Workforce Grants awarded in 2024–25

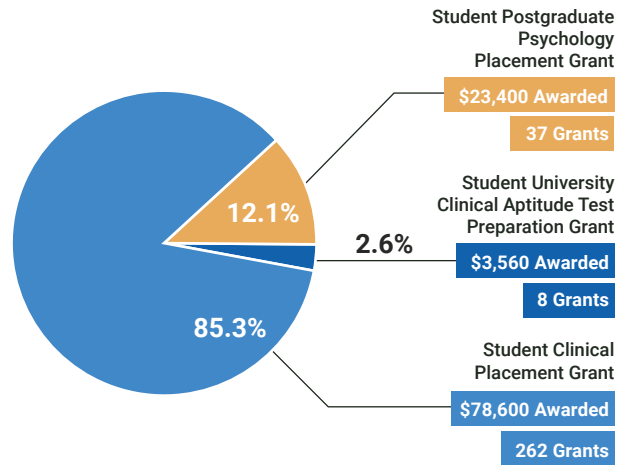
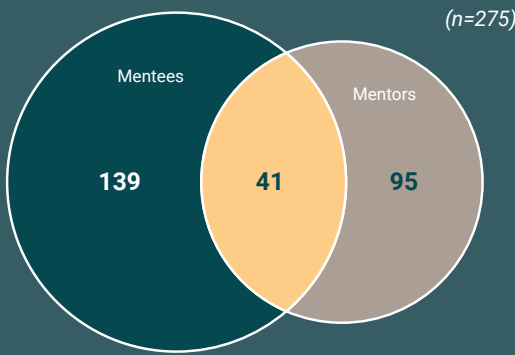


Figure 7: Mentors and mentees in the Dr JuMP Program



DR JuMP

DR JuMP is a coordinated mentoring program supporting medical students, junior doctors and registrars across regional Victoria. Designed to strengthen and expand the state’s rural and regional health workforce, the program fosters professional connections through mentoring, education, events and networking opportunities.

Managed by a consortium of stakeholders, DR JuMP is auspiced by RWAV and continues to grow, currently supporting 275 participants, including 139 mentees, 95 mentors, and 41 individuals participating as both mentor and mentee (Figure 7).

Future Workforce Engagement

This year we continued to strengthen our commitment to building Victoria’s future rural and regional health workforce by actively engaging with students across the state.

Health Industry Immersion Experience, Gippsland Health Camp

RWAV funded the Gippsland Health Industry Immersion Camp on 21–22 May, enabling 85 students and 26 staff to take part in interactive health workshops and a careers dinner, with support from regional Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN), Federation University and TAFE Gippsland. The sponsorship also ensured participation from South Gippsland and Bass Coast students, along with RWAV Student Ambassadors.

Health Exploration Days, Federation University, Ararat and Horsham

RWAV sponsored the Health Exploration Day at Federation University in Ballarat, where 70 Year 9 students participated in interactive Allied Health and Nursing workshops alongside a wide range of local health and education partners.

National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN)

RWAV sponsored and presented at the NRHSN Council 2 Meeting on 8 September, joining around 50 student leaders from across Australia to discuss rural health workforce challenges and reinforce our commitment to student engagement and leadership.

Allied Health ‘Come and Try Day’, Bendigo

On 1 August, RWAV supported the Allied Health ‘Come and Try Day’ in Bendigo, giving 80 Year 9 and 10 students hands-on experiences and the chance to engage directly with health professionals through a collaborative, industry-led event.

Careers Expos and Outreach

RWAV participated in key career expos throughout the year, including the Golden Plains Careers Expo, where it engaged with over 800 participants, and the Ballarat Jobs and Training Expo on 26 July, where RWAV Student Ambassadors Suzi Koene (Psychologist) and Mitchell Roberts (Medical Student) shared personal insights into rural health careers.

RWAV Student Ambassador Program

In 2024–25, RWAV's Student Ambassador Program engaged and inspired students across Victoria through the efforts of 17 passionate ambassadors, health students and recent graduates, who shared their personal journeys to drive interest in rural health careers.

The Student Ambassadors participated in key outreach activities, including Highlands LLEN's 'Real Talks' series, school visits with hands-on health activities, 'Inspiring Dinners' at student health camps and regional careers expos.

On 31 October, Student Ambassadors Cameron Mekken and Daniel Patchett visited Orbost Community College to share their career journeys with Year 10 and 11 students. 'Our students really enjoyed it and found the information relevant,' Orbost Community College noted, adding that the attendance of Cameron, a former student, made the session especially inspiring.

RWAV acknowledges the commitment of its 2024–25 Student Ambassadors: Suzi Koene, Mitchell Roberts, Slobodanka Jevtic,

Mai Khanh (Stacy) Doan, Daniel Patchett, Cameron Mekken, Tehnan Shah and Laura Bently.

In May, RWAV Student Ambassador, Tehnan Shah, a radiography student at Monash University, spoke at the Ballarat Christian College through the Highlands LLEN's Real Talks series. The program brings professionals into regional schools to share career journeys in fields such as health, midwifery, trades, business, education and social enterprise.

Tehnan's story resonated as she reflected on her high school experience and the path to radiography. 'Talking to the auditorium full of kids made me so excited to think perhaps one of them could be my colleague one day. I'm grateful to be a part of someone's (career) journey,' Tehnan says.

Her message encouraged students to view health careers as accessible and rewarding, highlighting diverse pathways into rural healthcare.

RWAV Conference 2025 and Student Meet-Up

RWAV proudly sponsored 10 university students and recent graduates to attend the 2025 RWAV Conference, with Student Ambassador, Stacy Doan, representing emerging professionals on the workforce panel, 'Working together, designing and innovating for workforce sustainability'.

For the first time, RWAV hosted a dedicated Student Meet-Up session, welcoming 9 local secondary students eager to explore health careers. The session connected them with 6 university students and graduates, alongside representatives from universities and GP colleges. The initiative provided high school students with valuable insights into academic pathways and career opportunities in the health sector, fostering early interest in rural health professions.



Photo: RWAV's Student Ambassador Tehnan Shah (4th from left) at Ballarat Christian College Highlands LLEN's Real Talks series.



Reference: Shah, T. (2025). Cat-Scans My Life with X-ray Vision. Victoria, Australia.



Scan to learn more about RWAV's Student Ambassador Program.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/seeking-rural-ambassadors/>

East Gippsland Medical Scholarship

The RWAV-sponsored East Gippsland Medical Scholarship, offered through Monash University, was awarded to medical students Daniel Patchett in 2024 and Meg Walsh in 2025. This scholarship supports students with a strong commitment to improving health outcomes in the Wellington and East Gippsland Shires. In addition to financial assistance for living costs, it provides opportunities for community engagement and local integration. By supporting dedicated students with regional ties, the scholarship plays a vital role in strengthening the future rural health workforce.

Daniel Patchett
East Gippsland Medical Scholarship recipient

Now in his final year of a medical degree at Monash University, Daniel has developed a strong foundation in clinical decision-making and patient care through a range of placements across Gippsland. His current anaesthetics rotation at Sale Hospital has solidified his goal of becoming a GP anaesthetist in East Gippsland, a pathway he is actively exploring through his involvement in the Victorian Rural Generalism Program as a student representative.

Committed to rural medicine and peer development, Daniel also mentors third-year students and will continue his rural training with placements in Bairnsdale later in 2025. He credits his positive learning journey to strong mentorship and the opportunities available through Monash's rural clinical school.

'By removing financial pressure, the scholarship has allowed me to dedicate more time and energy to my clinical placement. In turn, this has helped me learn more and better integrate with the teams I'm working with. Thank you for your support of both my training and healthcare in East Gippsland,' Daniel says.



Photo: Daniel Patchett, recipient of the RWAV-sponsored East Gippsland Medical Scholarship 2024.

Meg Walsh
East Gippsland Medical Scholarship recipient

Meg, a fourth-year medical student at Monash University, is passionate about pursuing a career in rural medicine, with a particular interest in women's health. Inspired by early experiences visiting family in Paynesville, she chose East Gippsland for her clinical placement to deepen her connection to the region and gain hands-on experience in rural healthcare.

Driven by a long-standing ambition to become a GP, Meg is eager to build her clinical skills and confidence and is especially interested in becoming a rural GP obstetrician. She sees her placement as an opportunity to explore the realities of rural general practice while contributing meaningfully to the local community.

'I am immensely grateful for this scholarship and cannot thank RWAV enough for this generous opportunity. It will allow me to become more immersed in the local community and make the most of my time in the beautiful East Gippsland region. Thank you for investing in my future in rural medicine,' Meg says.

Reference: Monash University. (2025). East Gippsland Medical Scholarship 2025 Scholarship Impact Report. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.



Photo: Meg Walsh, recipient of the RWAV-sponsored East Gippsland Medical Scholarship 2025.



Scan here to read the East Gippsland Medical Scholarship 2025 Scholarship Impact Report.
<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-Impact-Report-East-Gippsland-Medical-Scholarship.pdf>



RWAV Award with the RACGP

RWAV proudly continued its support of the RACGP Victoria Faculty through sponsorship of an annual award presented at the 2024 RACGP Victoria Fellowship and Awards ceremony. The RWAV Award recognises a rural GP living and working in an MMM 3–6 location who attains the highest combined results across all 3 fellowship exams completed within the same cycle.

Through initiatives like this, RWAV remains committed to strengthening the rural and regional health workforce and supporting equitable access to healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This year, RWAV was pleased to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of:

- **Dr Krystal Green**, Semester 2 2023 RWAV Award recipient
- **Dr Karolina Novak**, Semester 1 2024 RWAV Award recipient.

Their accomplishments highlight both clinical excellence and a deep commitment to serving rural communities across Victoria.



Photo: Dr Karolina Novak (right) receiving the RWAV Award at the 2024 RACGP Victoria Annual Fellowship Ceremony from Adjunct Associate Professor Morton Rawlin AM (left), RWAV Board Director and RACGP Victoria Council Member.



Photo: Dr Krystal Green (right) receiving the RWAV Award at the 2024 RACGP Victoria Annual Fellowship Ceremony from Adjunct Associate Professor Morton Rawlin AM (left), RWAV Board Director and RACGP Victoria Council Member. Photos courtesy of © RACGP.

Building meaningful engagement



Rural Connect

We regularly engage with stakeholders and communities, through our networks of health organisations, clinics, universities, students and colleges, through attending conferences and job fairs, and through direct engagement with healthcare practices, community health organisations and ACCOs.

In 2024–25, we expanded this engagement through a new series of Rural Connect visits to rural and regional towns, targeting priority locations identified in the 2024 Rural Health Workforce Census.

The Rural Connect program of tailored stakeholder visits aims to:

- build and strengthen relationships with stakeholders to foster mutual understanding and cooperation
- gain firsthand insights into local challenges, priorities and opportunities
- promote awareness of our services and programs, ensuring alignment with community and practitioner needs
- explore potential partnerships and collaborative opportunities to improve health outcomes in rural Victoria
- demonstrate our commitment to rural and regional health and workforce sustainability
- share and gain data on local health needs
- enable learning and professional development of RWAV staff
- enable local practitioners to network with each other and with RWAV.

Our first Rural Connect visit took place from 20–22 May, covering Nhill, Stawell, Ararat and Elmhurst. Nhill and Ararat are 2025–26 RWAV priority locations, as identified through the RWAV Census and other data.

RWAV appreciated the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with GPs and pharmacists, East Grampians Health Service CEO and staff, Northern Grampians Shire CEO and staff, and the Western Victoria Primary Health Network (PHN) CEO. Additional highlights for the team included visiting Budja Budja Medical Centre in Ararat, a past recipient of our Allied Health New Service Grant, and the dedicated team at Elmhurst Bush Nursing Service.

This initiative reinforced the value of face-to-face engagement in building strong relationships with local practitioners and services. We aim to expand our Rural Connect visits in the coming year to deepen these connections statewide and provide vital local insights to better target our efforts.



Photo: (L–R) Rural Connect meeting in Stawell with Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Justine Kingan, Director Strategy, Prosperity and Engagement, Northern Grampians Shire; Brent McAllister, CEO, Northern Grampians Shire; and Kate Temby, General Manager Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV.

Over a 2-day-visit, RWAV returned to the road to visit the priority locations of Maryborough and St Arnaud. CEO Lauren Cordwell, GM of Strategy and Partnerships Kate Temby, Strategy and Policy Advisor Dr Lee Barclay, and Allied Health Program Coordinator Fiona Wilson met with local healthcare professionals and community members to discuss grants, scholarships, recruitment services, and workforce insights. The team also visited East Wimmera Health Service and the Physiotherapy Centre, learning firsthand about local needs, challenges, and successes.



Photo: (L–R) Dr Md Rafiqul Islam, Director of Medical Services, East Wimmera Health Service, Geoffrey Lord, Director of People & Culture, East Wimmera Health Service, Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV, Kate Temby, General Manager Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV, Dr Lee Barclay, Strategy and Policy Advisor, RWAV, and Fiona Wilson, Allied Health Program Coordinator, RWAV.



Photo: (L–R) Johanna Medlyn, Senior Physiotherapist & Director, St Arnaud Physiotherapy Centre; Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Dr Lee Barclay, Strategy and Policy Advisor and Kate Temby, General Manager Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV.



Photo: (L–R) Dr Lee Barclay, Strategy and Policy Advisor, RWAV, Katie Erwin, Physiotherapist, Monique Tillig, Physiotherapist, Dr Michael M Veal, The Trustee for Central Highlands Health Network, Joanna Southcombe, Remedial Massage Therapist & Sports Rehabilitator, Johanna Medlyn, Senior Physiotherapist & Director, St Arnaud Physiotherapy Centre, Fiona Wilson, Allied Health Program Coordinator, RWAV, and Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV.

Parliamentary Breakfast

RWAV hosted a breakfast event at the Victorian Parliament, aimed at highlighting the vital role of rural and regional health professionals and our shared commitment to strengthening Victoria's rural health workforce. The event brought together Members of Parliament, health leaders, practitioners, and RWAV representatives in a spirit of collaboration and shared purpose.

The conversations explored ways to build a sustainable future for rural healthcare through greater investment, workforce support, and practical solutions to attract and retain health professionals.

RWAV's CEO Lauren Cordwell, board members, and general managers were privileged to meet with the Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP MLA, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, and Member for Macedon; the Michaela Settle MLA, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria, Parliamentary Secretary for Community Sport, and Member for Eureka; the Hon Peter Walsh MLA, Member for Murray Plains; and Simon Hammersley, Senior Advisor to Minister Tierney, Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water, and Member for Western Victoria.

We were also delighted to welcome rural practitioners Dr Stephen Tudge (ENT), Jessica Moller (Gippsland Lakes Complete Health), and Brenton Kiel (Goulburn Valley Physiotherapy Centre), who shared valuable insights from the frontline of rural care.

RWAV looks forward to continuing these meaningful conversations in the new financial year, with government and sector partners to deliver stronger, more connected health outcomes for rural and regional Victorians.

Photo: (L-R) Dr Stephen Tudge, ENT, Jessica Moller, Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV, and Brenton Kiel, Goulburn Valley Physiotherapy Centre.



Photo: (L-R) Hon Peter Walsh MLA, Member for Murray Plains and Prof Grant Phelps, RWAV Board Chair



Photo left: (L-R) Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Michaela Settle MLA, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria, with Prof Grant Phelps, RWAV Board Chair



Photo below: (L-R) Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP MLA, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Member for Macedon; and Prof Grant Phelps, RWAV Board Chair



Photo: Attendees at the RWAV Parliamentary Breakfast

Visiting Shepparton: A key hub for health professionals

CEO Lauren Cordwell visited Shepparton, a key hub for health professionals, where she met with Sam Birrell MP, Federal Member for Nicholls, to discuss regional healthcare access and its challenges. She also met with Kellie Thompson from Goulburn Valley Health, and Matt Jones, CEO of Murray PHN, gaining valuable insights into the region's healthcare workforce.



Photo: Sam Birrell MP (left), Federal Member for Nicholls with Lauren Cordwell (right), CEO, RWAV in Shepparton.

CEO visits Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS)

The BCHS team was joined by Lisa Chesters MP, the Federal Member for Bendigo, to mark Endometriosis Awareness Month and highlight the importance of women's health and the dedicated sexual and reproductive health clinic at BCHS. Mandy Hutchinson, CEO, BCHS met with Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV at the same event to share information about their work in supporting the health and wellbeing of their community.



Photo: Lauren Cordwell (right), CEO, RWAV, visited Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) and met with CEO, Mandy Hutchinson (left), and the BCHS team.

Primary care conference Canberra

CEO Lauren Cordwell attended the Primary care conference in Canberra in September 2024. The conference focussed on supporting a national dialogue on primary care, collaborating to tackle key policy challenges, and sharing learnings and innovations.



Photo: (L-R) Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Jane London, Executive Director for Strategy and Service Design at Eastern Melbourne PHN; Bronwyn Morris Donovan, CEO, Allied Health Professions Australia, Primary Care Conference, Canberra.



Photo: (L-R) Kath Hetherington, Service Delivery at the NSW Rural Doctors Network; Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Mike Edwards, Primary Care Conference, Canberra

Australasian College of Health Service Management (ACHSM) 2025 Health Leadership Conference

Lauren Cordwell, CEO of RWAV, was invited to be part of the ACHSM One-Day Health Leadership Conference, joining a conference panel on 'Making Progress on the Workforce Challenge.'

The conference panel examined the health workforce landscape, strongly emphasising rural health. Discussions highlighted key enablers, best practices, and actionable steps, ending with a powerful reminder of the vital role of the rural workforce.



Photo: (L-R) Daniel Pilbrow, CEO, IntelliCare; Dr Paul Eleftheriou, Principal, Nous Group; Prof Mark Cormack, Professor of Health System Policy, Australian National University; Lisa Fitzpatrick, Secretary, Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation Victorian Branch; and Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV.

Victorian Rural Health Conference, Mildura



Photo: (L-R) Carla Taylor, (former) CEO, General Practice Supervision Australia; Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Gemma Bilardi, (former) Project Development Manager, Echuca Regional Health; Julie Rogalsky, Regional Coordinator, Victorian Rural Generalist Program; Matt Jones, CEO, Murray PHN at the Victorian Rural Health Conference in Mildura.



Future early career workforce models at the Allied Health Roundtable, Shepparton

RWAV and Murray PHN co-hosted an allied health roundtable in Shepparton on 20 November to address the attraction and retention of early-career allied health professionals. Participants included Goulburn Valley Health, Hume Health Service Partnership, La Trobe and Melbourne Universities, Primary Care Connect, SARRAH and private practitioners.

Discussions centred on workforce models, policy reforms, recruitment strategies and local success stories, making the event a valuable partnership and exchange of ideas.

The discussions led to opportunities for new partnerships and coordinated recruitment and retention initiatives. RWAV and Murray PHN will continue to build on this momentum in the months ahead.

Photo: Allied health roundtable participants in Shepparton.

(Row 1 L-R) Dr Lee Barclay, Strategy and Policy Advisor, RWAV; Jane Stephens, Manager HHSP Programs, Hume Health Service Partnership; Sophie Bond, Manager General Practice Engagement, Murray PHN; Scott Gibbings, Physiotherapist and Director, SARRAH; Jacque Phillips, COO, Murray PHN; Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV; Brenton Kiel, Physiotherapist, Goulburn Valley Physiotherapy Centre; Ryan McGrath, Rural Health Academic Network Coordinator and Educator, The University of Melbourne; Leigh Stanbrook, Executive Manager Health Services, Primary Care Connect.

(Row 2 L-R) Sally Belcher, Health Independence Program Manager, Goulburn Valley Health; Jo Kinder, La Trobe University Northern Victorian Education Partnership Project, La Trobe University.

(Row 3 L-R) Janis Bull, Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Coordinator, Murray PHN; Catherine Mather, Manager Complex and Integrated Care, Murray PHN; Caroline Handley, Manager Workforce Development, Murray PHN; Kate Temby, GM Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV; Gabriela Gauthier, Allied Health Program Coordinator, RWAV.



Rural Workforce Agency Meeting, Adelaide

RWAV regularly meets with other rural workforce agencies across Australia to collaborate on projects.

Photo: Rural Workforce Agency Meeting, Adelaide

(Top L-R) Dan Lowe, The People Project, Tasmania; Paul Connolly GAICD, NT PHN; Kath Hetherington, Rural Doctors Network; Lauren Cordwell, RWAV; Edward Swan GAICD, Rural Health Workforce Australia.

(Below L-R) Peter Barns, The People Project, Tasmania; Tim Shackleton, Rural Health West; Kelli Porter, Rural Health West; Mandy McCulloch, Rural Doctors Workforce Agency.

VICTORIAN RURAL HEALTH AWARDS



2025

Celebrating 20 Years

SUPPORTED BY



RWAV proudly hosted the 20th annual Victorian Rural Health Awards, celebrating the outstanding achievements of individuals and teams dedicated to improving rural healthcare. This prestigious event brings together healthcare professionals, stakeholders and supporters from across Victoria to recognise excellence and honour the diverse contributions of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, Aboriginal Health Workers, practice managers and consumer advocates serving regional and rural communities.

The 2025 awards were supported by the Victorian Department of Health and the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The awards were delivered as an online virtual event on Thursday 19 June. The event attracted 411 registrations and welcomed 301 attendees, marking a 31% increase in participation compared to the previous year.

Award nominations officially opened on 20 February during the Networking and Celebration Dinner at the 2025 RWAV Conference. RWAV received a record 116 nominations, reflecting the community's enthusiasm and appreciation for rural healthcare champions.

This year also introduced a new category, the Outstanding Contribution by an RWAV Student Ambassador Award. This inaugural award recognised a current student or recent graduate who has shown exceptional commitment to rural and regional healthcare in Victoria. The award celebrates those who advocate for rural communities, promote rural practice, and inspire their peers to pursue careers where they are needed most.

A panel of 25 expert judges from across the sector – including representatives from Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS), Mirriyu Cultural Consulting & Balim Balim Dreaming, the RACGP, Alfred Health, the Australian Association of Practice Management, General Practice Supervision Australia and Safer Care Victoria – played a vital role in the integrity and strength of the judging process.

The event proudly showcased the Victorian Government's commitment to rural health, with the Minister for Health, the Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP opening the awards.

This year's awards video once again highlighted the profound impact of past and current winners. Considerable effort was made to feature their stories, ensuring the event remained both relevant and memorable.

Award recipients expressed heartfelt gratitude for the many messages of congratulations shared by peers, organisations, the media and the public. During the event, powerful community reflections captured deep appreciation for this year's winners.

The 2025 Victorian Rural Health Awards continued to shine a spotlight on the dedication, leadership and impact of rural healthcare professionals, reinforcing the value of their work in advancing the health and wellbeing of rural and regional communities across Victoria.

2025 Victorian Rural Health Awards: Winners



Outstanding Contribution by a Rural GP or Rural Generalist

Dr Gregory Hayes

Cunninghame Arm Medical Centre,
Lakes Entrance



Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Medical Specialist

Dr Ruwangi Udayasiri

Goulburn Valley Health and Shepparton
Women's Health Centre, Shepparton



Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Dr David Bertovic

Alfred Hospital, Melbourne and Gippsland
and East Gippsland Aboriginal
Co-Operative, Bairnsdale



Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Health Consumer Advocate

Sally Fraser

Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural
Health Research, La Trobe University,
Bendigo



Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Multidisciplinary Team

Ontario Medical Clinic

Mildura



Outstanding Contribution by a Mentor or Supervisor

Dr Mehdi Sanatipour

Sunraysia Medical Centre, Red Cliffs



Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Primary Care Nurse or Midwife

Kate Worsfold

Kyabram Regional Clinic, Kyabram



Outstanding Contribution to Rural Allied Health

Lesley Robinson

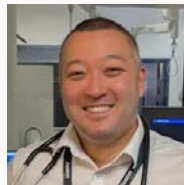
West Wimmera Health Service, Nhill



Outstanding Contribution to Rural Practice Management

Rachael Hatzopoulos

Ashby Street Medical Centre, Trafalgar



Outstanding Contribution to Rural Healthcare Outreach Provision

Dr Julian Yeoh

Alba Health, Myrtleford



Outstanding Contribution by a Rising Star

Jemuel Prye

Allied Physiotherapy, Ocean Grove



Outstanding Contribution by a RWAV Student Ambassador

Stacy Doan

Deakin University, Geelong

New award

Length of Service Award (35+ years of service)

Dr Andrew Gault, Port Fairy
Medical Clinic, Port Fairy

Dr Daryl Smith, Macleod Street
Medical Centre, Bairnsdale

Dr David Monash, Inglis Medical
Centre, Sale

Dr David Wilson, Lister House
Medical Clinic, Horsham

Dr Elizabeth Quin, Springs
Medical, Daylesford

Dr Ernan Hession, Swan Hill
Primary Health Medical Centre,
Swan Hill

Dr Gavin Frawley, Ovens Medical
Group, Wangaratta

Dr Gerard Brownstein, Benalla
Church Street Surgery, Benalla

Dr Gregory Stewart, Springs
Medical, Daylesford

Dr Hugh Chisholm, Leongatha
Healthcare and Gippsland
Southern Health Service,
Leongatha

Dr Ian Sutherland, Port Fairy Medical
Clinic, Port Fairy

Dr Janis Baker, Broadford Medical
Clinic, Broadford

Dr John Guymer, Wyndham House
Clinic, Shepparton

Dr Mary Holland, Flora Hill Medical
Centre, Flora Hill

Dr Nicholas Kimpton, Ballarat
Medical Centre, Ballarat

Dr Peter Hales, Surf Coast Medical
Centre, Torquay

Dr Peter Rogers, Healesville Medical
Centre, Healesville

Dr Robert Dawson, Latrobe Regional
Health, Traralgon

Dr Ross De Steiger, Bairnsdale
Medical Group, Bairnsdale

Kerrie Thomsen, Hallmark Integrated
Health Services, Bairnsdale

Lesley Robinson, West Wimmera
Health Service, Nhill



Scan Here to Watch Now

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=BnAo_qN4bpc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnAo_qN4bpc)

Celebrating 20 Years

Winners' Reflections

Ontario Medical Clinic Mildura Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Multidisciplinary Team Award Winner

Brooke Shelly, Consultant Pharmacist / GP Practice Pharmacist, speaking on behalf of the team at Ontario Medical Clinic, Mildura, says the clinic is 'incredibly proud to be acknowledged for work that reflects not just clinical excellence but true multidisciplinary collaboration'.

'The award validated the work we've put into building strong interdisciplinary trust between GPs, pharmacists, nurses and admin staff, and affirmed that rural general practice can lead the way in system reform,' Brooke says.

'The response from our local community has been overwhelmingly positive. Patients have mentioned seeing the announcement and shared kind words during consults. Colleagues from across the state have also reached out to learn more about our model. It's prompted some powerful conversations around the value of truly integrated care in rural settings, and the need to support and invest in these kinds of collaborations more broadly. The model we created, the Chronic Opioid Use Cycle of Care, has drawn interest from other practices and PHNs looking to replicate something similar.

'Recognition like this reminds us that rural teams can be leaders in innovation, not despite the challenges, but sometimes because of them.'

Sally Fraser Outstanding Contribution by a Rural Health Consumer Advocate Award Winner

Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research, La Trobe University, Bendigo

Sally says she is happy to be continuing her work with the Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research, La Trobe University, Bendigo, including a new RISE4 Cancer project focusing on skin cancer treatment for rural consumers in the Loddon Mallee region.

'I enjoy being a part of the advisory committee for the Rural Health Consumer Panel, plus the occasional Sentinel event review panel in the Loddon Mallee region or at Barwon Health now that I am based in Geelong.

The whole experience of the Rural Health Awards has been a happy, exciting time from the initial nomination to the very well organised awards ceremony, then the certificate, greetings and congratulations all rounded off by the invitation to [the RWAV Conference 2026] dinner!'

Stacy Doan Outstanding Contribution by a RWAV Student Ambassador Award Winner

Stacy, an occupational therapy student at Deakin University, Geelong, describes receiving the award as 'a moment of immense pride and deep humility.'

'It reminded me that even as students, we have the power to make a real difference in people's lives,' Stacy says.

'The award has definitely inspired me to keep moving forward in my rural health journey. I'm continuing my work as an Allied Health Assistant Grade 3 in community neurorehabilitation across Geelong and surrounding areas, and I'm incredibly excited to be graduating as an occupational therapist in the next few months. That's the next chapter I'm working towards, and this recognition gives me extra motivation to get there.'

Photo: RWAV team filming the Welcome to Country with Thane Garvey



Scan here to watch Dr Ruwangi Udayasiri speaking of her nomination

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bihnaw9La14>

Videos courtesy of the © WIN Network.
Reference: Udayasiri, D. R. (2025). Victorian Rural Health Awards Nominations. (W. N. Shepparton, Interviewer)

Photo: Winner Dr Ruwangi Udayasiri, Goulburn Valley Health/Shepparton Women's Health Centre as featured in Win News Shepparton.

NAIDOC Week 2024

'Keep the fire burning! Blak, loud and proud'

RWAV proudly joined the NAIDOC Week March to stand in solidarity and celebrate the strength, resilience and rich cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. NAIDOC Week is an important time for all Australians to reflect, learn and honour the oldest continuous living cultures on earth. Participating in the march reinforces RWAV's commitment to cultural respect, reconciliation and working together for a shared future.

Photo right: Nilmini John and Isaac Donley (centre) from the Australian College of Optometry with RWAV's Outreach team's Candace Marsden, Manager Outreach & Regional Services (far right) and Jasmine Mannix, Program Coordinator – Outreach & Regional Services Healthcare Access (far left).

Photo below: Sowmya Rao (left) from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) with RWAV's Outreach team's Candace Marsden, Manager Outreach & Regional Services (centre) and Jasmine Mannix, Program Coordinator – Outreach & Regional Services Healthcare Access (right).



Albury–Wodonga NAIDOC Celebrations

RWAV's Nicolle Dawson attended the Albury–Wodonga NAIDOC celebrations event at Gateway Village Burraja Cultural Centre in Wodonga. 'As a proud Wiradjuri woman, I feel privileged to work at RWAV and to be able to come back to Wiradjuri country and connect with the local community for NAIDOC week celebrations!' says Nicolle. These celebrations are an opportunity to honour First Nations cultures and strengthen community connections.



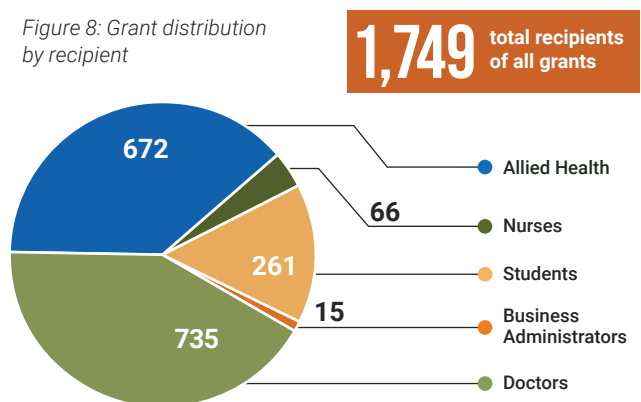
Photo: Nicolle Dawson, Quality Improvement Advisor, RWAV at the Albury–Wodonga NAIDOC Week Celebrations.

Photo below: NAIDOC Celebrations in Albury–Wodonga.



Ongoing professional development and the accompanying networking opportunities play a vital role in encouraging retention of the rural healthcare workforce.

Figure 8: Grant distribution by recipient

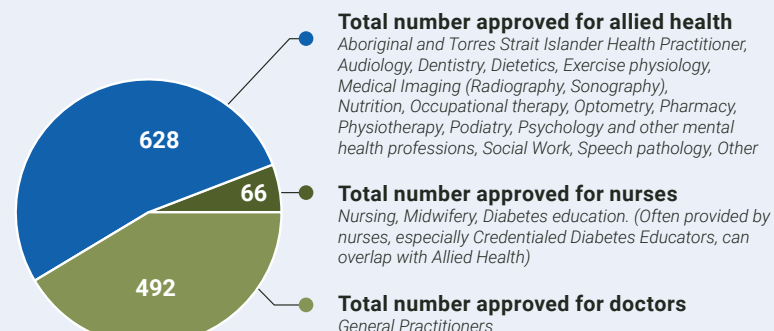
**Grantee Profession**

RWAV-administered grants for 2024–2025 are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and the Victorian Department of Health.

The Health Workforce Scholarship Program supports doctors, nurses and allied health professionals with subsidies to help cover costs associated with clinical upskilling and post-graduate tertiary studies. Financial support is available to healthcare providers working in primary care in MMM 3-7 locations, or in an ACCO throughout Victoria.

In 2024-25 RWAV funded \$2,211,892.18 for 1,186 applicants up to a maximum of \$10,000 each per year, to build on their clinical knowledge and skills at a range of workshops, online studies, hands-on activities, and conferences. Forty-one of these grant recipients were supported for their formal post-graduate studies.

Figure 9: Health Workforce Scholarship Program grant distribution by recipient



This program is supported by the Victorian Department of Health and subsidises medical practitioners who are providing primary care in MMM 2-7 locations throughout Victoria. Funds up to \$5,000 per applicant assisted 243 doctors to continue to expand on their current skills, to enable them to better support their local community. Over \$322,000 was awarded to successful grant applicants over the 2024-25 financial year.

On behalf of the Australian Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, RWAV processed 250 applications for Workforce Incentive Program Rural Advanced Skills (WIP-RAS) payments for General Practitioners and Rural Generalists with advanced skills working in regional, rural and remote communities. An additional six doctors who provide eligible services and/or undertake training that is not reflected in the MBS, applied for the Flexible Payment Scheme.

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Feedback from Grant recipients

David Wong

Dentist, GEGAC, Bairnsdale

I have learnt some new restorative techniques for use when treating patients. Many teeth with questionable or poor restorative prognosis have been given an additional chance before extraction, leaving patients with a better quality of life. I believe that by completing this course, my rural Aboriginal patient base has a better restorative outcome when being treated.

Anonymous

GP, Warrnambool

I now have improved confidence and understanding of the latest guideline updates relating to HIV management and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention, including a greater understanding of sexually transmitted infections and the latest recommendations for treatment, including the current Mpox outbreak.

Seray Lim

Audiologist, Arches Audiology, Mulgrave and Churchill

Attending a dedicated conference on Otitis Media in Aboriginal communities has been one of the most valuable learning experiences I have had in my career.

I will connect with our Aboriginal consultant about creating culturally appropriate resources to be used in the treatment of APD, which I currently offer at the ACCO I work in.

Rowena Van Den Broek

Nurse, Clocktower Medical Centre, Sale

I have gained invaluable knowledge in wound care which I will use in my everyday practice. I will also be sharing the knowledge with my colleagues to improve our care and ensure it is consistent and in line with the latest best practice.

Anonymous

Dental assistant, Yarrawonga

I gained practical strategies for explaining complex dental procedures in simple terms, managing anxious patients with empathy, and building trust through clear, respectful interactions. These skills have enhanced my confidence and professionalism in clinical settings.

Anonymous

Physiotherapist, Mildura

It was amazing to hear about all the innovations and latest information that I otherwise would not have had access to. The professional development experience was so valuable. I would never have been able to attend the course without the support of RWAV.

Anonymous

GP / Skin cancer doctor, Shepparton

I have enhanced my skills and confidence in skin cancer surgery, as well as developed the ability to operate independently in areas with limited access to specialist surgeons, and refined and defined the limits of my practice where appropriate.

Cultural Safety Training (CST)

RWAV continues to support the delivery of CST to healthcare professionals and support staff across rural and regional Victoria, fostering culturally responsive care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2024, we facilitated both in-person and virtual CST workshops, equipping 20 participants with practical tools to enhance communication, reflect on personal biases and apply culturally safe practices in healthcare settings. These sessions encouraged self-awareness and a deeper understanding of the importance of culturally respectful care.

16 health professionals completed online CST modules developed by the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association. These modules provided foundational knowledge of the historical and current factors influencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and offered strategies to embed cultural respect into everyday practice.

Grants Week 2024: 7–11 October

Now in its third year, Grants Week promoted RWAV's funding opportunities for rural and regional healthcare professionals, practices, and students. In 2024, RWAV introduced a new podcast format in place of traditional webinars, releasing 28 episodes covering the 2024–25 grants suite.

The initiative attracted strong engagement and around 200 downloads during the week. The podcasts now remain available as an ongoing resource on RWAV's website.



Photo: Tyledon, Cathy Mitton

Anonymous quotes reflect participants who preferred not to be named.

Snap Survey: Rural Victoria Non-Urgent Patient Appointment Waiting Times

In July 2024, RWAV conducted a Snap Survey to better understand patient wait times for non-urgent appointments in rural Victoria, where demand often exceeds supply. The survey received 78 usable responses, 50% from GPs and practice managers, 10% from nurses and midwives, and 35% from allied health practitioners.

Key findings revealed 34% of respondents reported patients waiting over a month for appointments, with the longest delays in MMM 4 and MMM 5 regions. Some patients in MMM 2 and MMM 3 areas experienced waits exceeding 3 months. Most respondents worked in MMM 5 locations, where no same-day appointments were available for allied health services. Only one general practice in MMM 3 and one nurse in MMM 5 could offer same-day bookings.

Among GPs across MMM 2–5, the majority reported wait times of 2 to 8 weeks, with 4 practices noting delays of up to 3 months. Notably, appointment availability did not correlate with the number of practitioners in a practice.

These findings highlight the urgency of addressing healthcare access challenges in rural Victoria, particularly in the face of growing demand and persistent workforce shortages.

Reference: RWAV. (2025). Snap Survey: Rural Victoria Non-Urgent Patient Appointment Waiting Times. Melbourne: RWAV



Scan to read the full results of the
**RWAV Snap Survey: Rural Victoria
Non-Urgent Patient Appointment
Waiting Times.**

<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Rural-Victoria-non-urgent-patient-appointment-waiting-times.pdf>

Snap Survey: Rural Accommodation Availability and Suitability for Healthcare Workers

From 15 January to 15 February 2025, RWAV conducted Snap Survey: Rural Accommodation Availability and Suitability for Healthcare Workers to better understand how housing impacts workforce attraction and retention in rural and regional Victoria.

Among respondents, 75% agreed that limited accommodation availability is a disincentive to rural practice. Between 12% and 18% reported no available housing in their area, while 23–35% said only a few options existed. Wait times of over 12 months were noted in several locations.

Affordability was also a concern. 53.15% of rentals in Western Victoria and over 58% of rentals in Northern Victoria and Gippsland exceeded cost expectations. Despite more than half reporting accommodation was suitable for various living arrangements, many noted limited options beyond singles or couples.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents supported introducing an accommodation advocate or navigator to assist health professionals relocating to rural areas.

These findings confirm that accommodation availability, cost, and quality remain significant barriers to building a stable rural health workforce, particularly for short-term placements. They outline the need for targeted, place-based solutions.

Reference: RWAV. (2025). Snap Survey: Rural Accommodation Availability and Suitability for Healthcare Workers. Melbourne: RWAV

Photo: Karadoc Avenue, Irymple, Lauren Cordwell



Figure 10: Locations with No accommodation and with Severe shortages

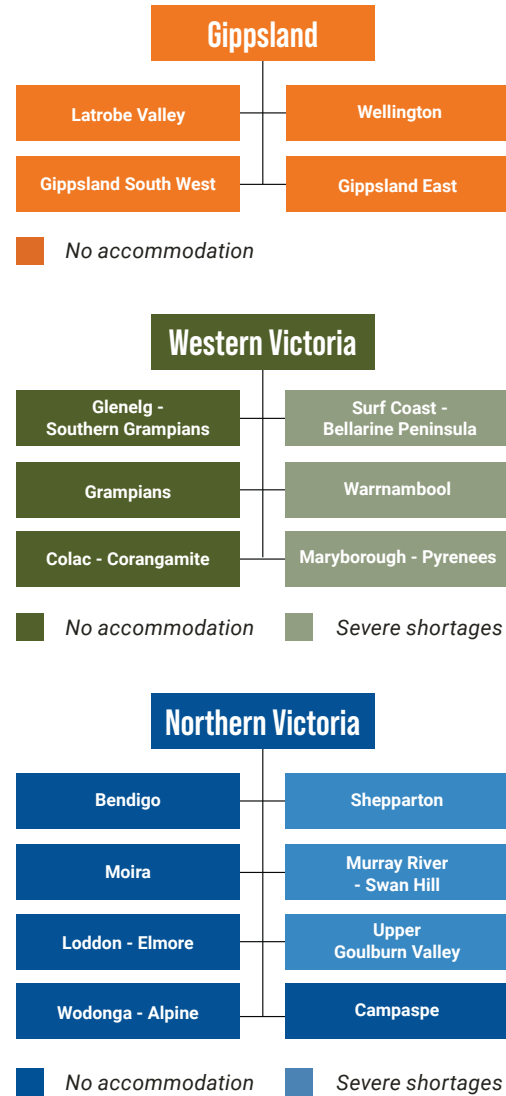


Figure 11: Should an Accommodation Advocate/Navigator be appointed?

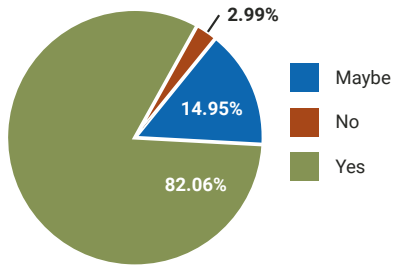
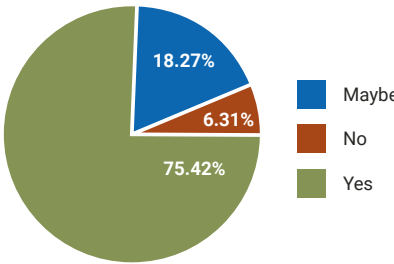


Figure 12: Is accommodation a disincentive to taking a rural or regional job?





Scan to read the full results of the RWAV Snap Survey: Rural Accommodation Availability and Suitability for Healthcare Workers.
<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Snap-Survey-03.pdf>

Insights from the Workforce Census and Needs Assessment

The Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census, led by RWAV, plays a vital role in capturing insights from health professionals and organisations to inform strategic decision-making and support equitable healthcare delivery across rural and regional Victoria, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The 2024 census received over 724 responses, a 24% increase from the previous year. It lays the groundwork for informing decision-making and work conducted by RWAV in 2025–26 and beyond.

There was broad geographic representation across PHN regions: Gippsland (22.2%), Murray (45.3%) and Western Victoria (25.5%). Strong participation was seen from allied health professionals (35%), GPs (27%) and nurses (16%).

Results revealed ongoing and critical workforce shortages, particularly in general practice, nursing, mental health, allied health and specialist roles. New and existing workforce hotspot locations have been identified across the Murray, Gippsland and Western Victoria PHN regions, highlighting areas where access to healthcare remains at risk due to inadequate workforce coverage.

Figure 13: Key health workforce occupations most in need across rural and regional Victoria



Figure 14: Five additional skills most required to meet community needs

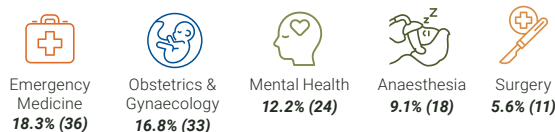


Figure 15: Length of time health professionals plan to work in rural/regional Victoria

38% of respondents considered leaving their rural employment in the past year

Thirty-eight per cent of respondents considered leaving their rural employment in the past year, citing workload burnout, poor work-life balance and limited career advancement. Primary reasons for considering leaving rural areas are as shown in Figure 16.

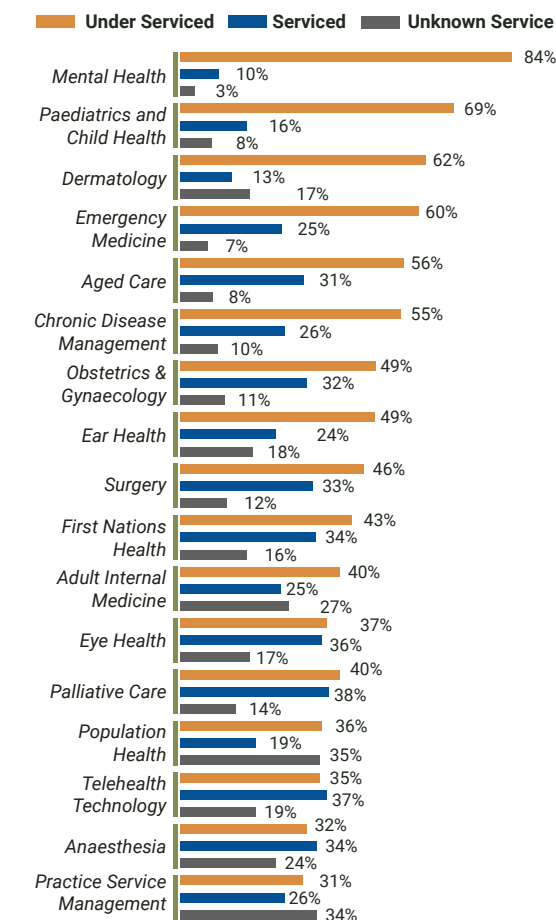
Figure 16: Reasons health professionals consider leaving rural areas



Rural communities experience persistent workforce shortages and under-servicing (Figure 17), notably in the areas of mental health (84%), paediatrics and child health (69%), dermatology (62%), emergency medicine (60%), aged care (56%) and chronic disease management (55%). This results in many patients struggling with long wait times, reduced access to specialists and the need to travel great distances for essential medical care.

Reference: RWAV. (2024). Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census. Victoria: RWAV

Figure 17: Service levels for the community by health category



10% of health professionals identified education support as the top additional skill needed.

84% of mental health services experience persistent workforce shortages and under-servicing in rural communities.

Retirement

76 GPs indicated that they may leave rural Victoria within the next 5 years. Of these, 49 have indicated they will be retiring.

46 allied health professionals indicated that they may leave rural Victoria within the next 5 years. Of these, 31 have indicated they will be retiring.

19 nurses or midwives indicated that they may leave rural Victoria within the next 5 years. Of these, 18 have indicated they will be retiring.

This could lead to critical staffing shortages, particularly in regions already facing challenges in healthcare access. Such losses are likely to result in longer patient wait times, decreased service availability, and increased pressure on the remaining workforce, potentially driving more health practitioners out of rural Victorian communities.

Figure 18: Professions planning to leave work in rural and regional Victoria

	Under 1 year	1 - 5 years	6 - 10 years	10 + years
General Practitioner	11	65	33	50
Allied Health	5	41	38	110
Nurse or Midwife	1	18	28	39
Specialist	2	7	1	14
Dental	-	3	-	7

32% of health professionals indicated that they may leave rural Victoria within the next 5 years.

22% of health professionals in rural Victoria are planning on retiring over the next 5 years.

Spotlight on Critical Priority Areas

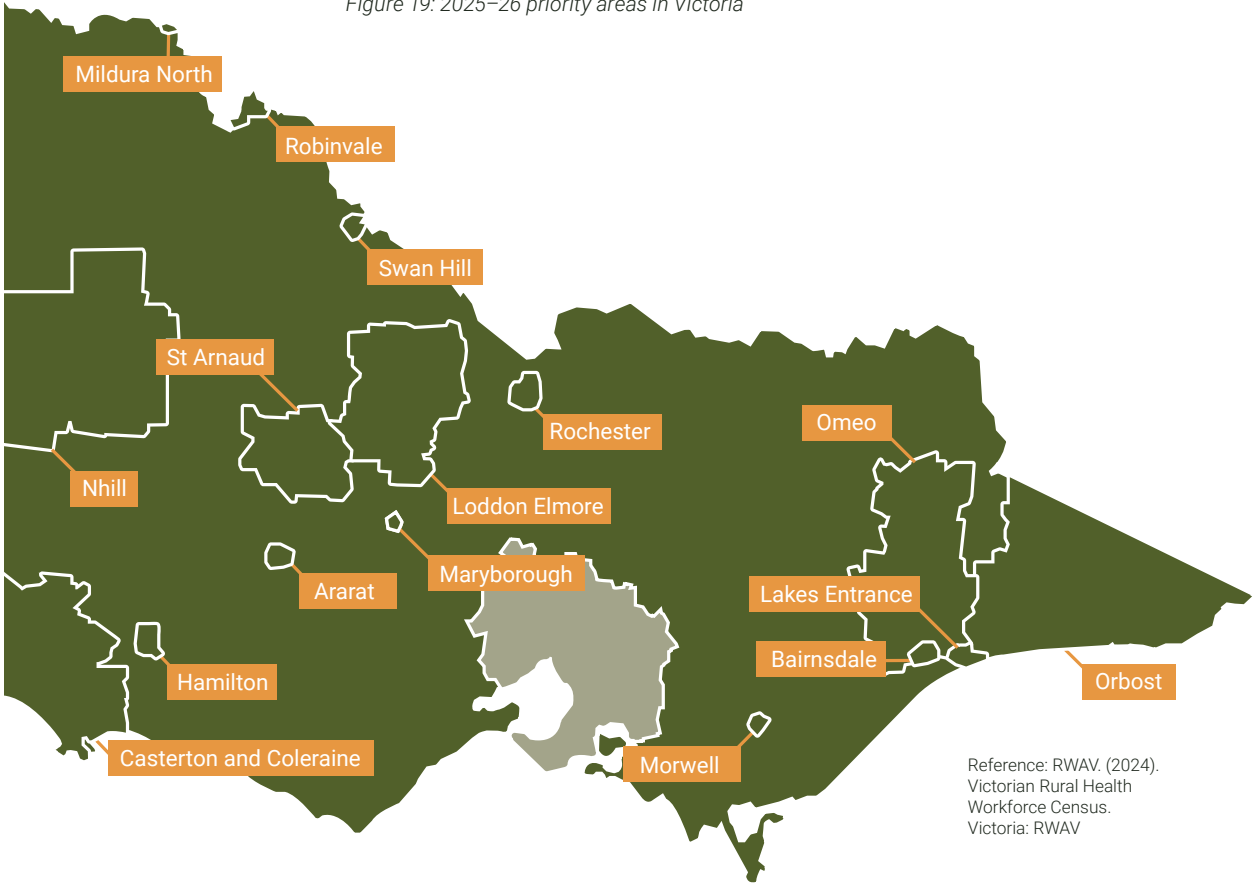
Workforce shortages remain critical, particularly in general practice, nursing, mental health, allied health and specialist roles. Several critical priority areas are identified in Figure 19.

Recruitment challenges, including relocation costs, accommodation shortages and childcare availability, further complicate workforce stability. Addressing these issues through policy reforms, increased funding and workforce planning initiatives is essential to ensuring equitable healthcare access across rural Victoria.

View the full Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census 2024 here.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Victorian-Rural-Health-Workforce-Census-2024.pdf>

Figure 19: 2025–26 priority areas in Victoria



Reference: RWAV. (2024). Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census. Victoria: RWAV

Advocacy and partnerships

Our deep and growing data collection and engagement with stakeholders throughout the state informs our programs and the positions we advocate for on behalf of rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and practitioners.

RWAV seeks to actively engage in national reviews on primary healthcare and workforce regulation policies and makes submissions and statements that advocate for rural health reforms.

Table 5: RWAV advocacy priorities 2023–25

1
Healthcare delivered to rural, regional and First Nations communities should be high quality and comprehensive.

2
All health professionals should be championed to work together to provide holistic and multidisciplinary healthcare in rural and First Nations communities.

3
Self-determination needs to be at the heart of healthcare provided to First Nations communities. Culturally safe practices should be adopted by all health practitioners and health service staff.

4
Appropriate quality and safety standards should underpin evidence-based innovations to deliver healthcare in communities.

5
Primary care health services in rural and regional Victoria should be appropriately funded to have the capacity and resources to educate the next generation of health professionals.



For more on our advocacy work, please visit the RWAV Advocacy page.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/advocacy-at-rwav/>

2024–25 RWAV position statements

Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation

RWAV acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Traditional Custodians and commits to reconciliation by improving culturally safe primary healthcare for rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In implementing our Reconciliation Action Plan, RWAV aims to address intergenerational trauma through self-determination, genuine partnerships, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led reforms. We will continue to enhance partnerships with First Nations health organisations, align with Closing the Gap reforms, and broaden and enrich our outreach and tailored recruitment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals and communities.

RWAV’s Commitment to Better Health for Rural, Regional and First Nations communities in Victoria

RWAV seeks to tackle poorer rural health outcomes caused by geographic isolation, workforce shortages, socioeconomic and infrastructural barriers, and intergenerational trauma and disadvantage.

We aim to strengthen our strategic partnerships, data-driven workforce solutions and community collaboration to achieve more equitable healthcare access, accessible workforce development opportunities, and place-based and culturally safe workforce solutions.

Statement on the National Allied Health Workforce Strategy

RWAV welcomes and broadly endorses the development of a National Allied Health Workforce Strategy and argues for strong rural and remote representation across all 5 proposed priorities. We highlight the value of the allied health assistant role and the need to expand alternative tertiary pathways, including initiatives such as entry quotas for rural students, sustained in-region course offerings and flexible delivery models. To bolster supervision capacity, we support further targeted funding, workforce resources and a national accreditation framework for supervisors.

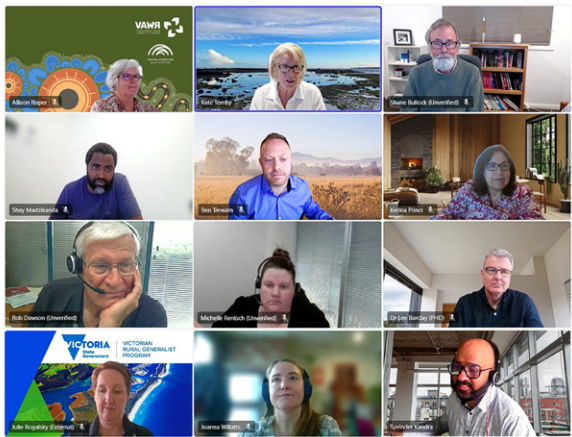
RWAV supports deepening research on existing rural workforce pilots and models of care, ensuring findings inform both policy makers and frontline teams.

Health Workforce Stakeholder Group

The RWAV Health Workforce Stakeholder Group comprises 88 members from 21 stakeholder organisations.

The group provides feedback on the annual RWAV Victorian Health Workforce Census findings, which informs the development of the annual RWAV Health Workforce Needs Assessment and identifies priority locations for targeted RWAV programs and services.

RWAV hosted 3 meetings with members from Northern Victoria, Western Victoria and Gippsland in October/November 2024, followed by a statewide meeting with all Health Workforce Stakeholder Group members in January 2025.



Row 1: (L–R) Allison Roper, Administration Officer Program Support, Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV; Kate Temby, GM Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV; Prof Shane Bullock, Head of School of Monash Rural Health.
Row 2: (L–R) Shay Madzikanda, GM Finance & Risk, RWAV; Ben Trewarn, Team Manager Health Professional Recruitment, RWAV; Kerina Princi, Manager Strategy and Partnerships, RWAV.
Row 3: (L–R) A/Prof Robert Dawson, Director, Gippsland Regional Training Hub; Michelle Rentsch, Regional Clinical Site Administrator, Monash University; Dr Lee Barclay, Strategy and Policy Advisor, RWAV.
Row 4: (L–R) Julie Rogalsky, Regional Coordinator, Victorian Rural Generalist Program; Jo Willatts, GM Service Delivery, RWAV; Ravinder Kandra, Manager Analytics and Reporting, RWAV.



Aboriginal Health Worker and Practitioners Gathering, Albury

RWAV supported 25 Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners to attend the third VACCHO Statewide Gathering. The gathering was held in Albury in March. Financial support for registration fees and costs associated with accommodation was provided through the Health Workforce Scholarship Program.

The program provided Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners with clinical upskilling in areas relevant to their role, including a day dedicated to wound care management.

VACCHO Statewide GP Gathering, Ballarat

This year's annual VACCHO Statewide GP Gathering was held in Ballarat in May 2025. RWAV supported doctors working in ACCOs in Victoria to attend the event through the Health Workforce Scholarship Program. The grant provided financial support for registration fees and costs related to travel and accommodation. The gathering offered doctors an opportunity to forge professional relationships, strengthen networks among their peers and access clinical upskilling. Our CEO, Lauren Cordwell, was honoured to be invited as a keynote speaker to the event, which was attended by 48 doctors.

*Photos left and below: Participants at the Aboriginal Health Worker and Practitioners Gathering in Albury.
Photos courtesy of © VACCHO*



Strategy Planning Workshop and Birrarung Wilam Walk

The RWAV Outreach team, together with CEO Lauren Cordwell, hosted a Strategy Planning workshop with the Community Grants Hub team from the Australian Department of Health.

As part of the workshop, participants took part in the Birrarung Wilam (River Camp) Walk, an Aboriginal Walking Tour led by the Koorie Heritage Trust. This experience offered a meaningful opportunity to deepen understanding of local Aboriginal culture, history and connection to Country. The stories shared highlighted the enduring significance of Birrarung Wilam as a place of gathering and cultural continuity.

Respecting Aboriginal culture and perspectives was central to the workshop. The tour played a vital role in shaping engagement strategies for 2024–25, grounding discussions in cultural awareness and reinforcing the importance of culturally respectful planning

Photo (L–R): Cher Twe, Manager Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV, Ann Tobin, Team Leader / Funding Arrangement Manager Indigenous Health Grants and Vic Outreach, Victorian State Office Department of Social Services, Andrew Quenette, Funding Arrangement Manager, Indigenous Grants, Victorian State Office Department of Social Services, Lauren Cordwell, CEO, RWAV, Candace Marsden, Senior Program Coordinator Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV, Jo Willatts, General Manager Service Delivery, RWAV, Jasmine Mannix, Program Coordinator Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV





Dreaming Big and Driving Change in Rural Healthcare

RWAV Conference 2025

Held in Bendigo from 19–21 February, the RWAV Conference 2025 brought together health professionals, policymakers, educators, rural health advocates and students to explore opportunities for a more sustainable, inclusive, and innovative rural and regional healthcare system in Victoria.

Under the theme 'Dreaming Big and Driving Change in Rural Healthcare', the conference focused on 3 key sub-themes:

- 'Policy perspectives and opportunities'
- 'Embracing data and technology'
- 'Working together, designing and innovating for workforce sustainability'.

The event featured insights from leading voices across government, academia, health services and community organisations. Discussions reflected a shared commitment to strengthening Victoria's rural health workforce and systems through innovation, equity and partnership.

The event was hosted by Kimberley Furness, a Bendigo-based entrepreneur and publisher passionate about amplifying regional and rural voices.

By fostering cross-sector dialogue and highlighting data-driven strategies, the RWAV Conference 2025 strengthened RWAV's role as a connector and enabler of rural health transformation, with outcomes that continue to shape future partnerships and strategic initiatives.

As part of the program, an interview was conducted between National Rural Health Commissioner, **Prof Jenny May AM**, with **Dr Louise Manning** RWAV Board Member, President of Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV).



Photo above: National Rural Health Commissioner, Prof Jenny May AM, with Dr Louise Manning RWAV Board Member, President of Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV).



Photo: Kimberley Furness, RWAV Conference host



Photo: Cr Andrea Metcalf, Mayor of Bendigo

Keynote speakers



Dallas Widdicombe
CEO, Bendigo and District
Aboriginal Co-operative



Prof Jane Mills
Pro Vice Chancellor
Health Innovation
(Regional) and Dean, La
Trobe Rural Health School



Rebecca Meynell
Director, Workforce
Strategy, Victorian
Department of Health



**Adj Assoc Prof Belinda
O'Sullivan**
BOS Health



Mandy Hutchinson
CEO, Bendigo Community
Health Services and member
of the Alliance of Rural and
Regional Community Health



Prof Lena Sanci
Head of Department of General
Practice and Primary Care, University
of Melbourne, and co-presenter:
Dr Bianca Forrester
Centre for Healthcare Resilience and
Implementation Science Australian
Institute of Health Innovation – online

Rural insights



Dr Jason Nebbs
Emergency Physician
and Director of Workforce
Operations at Victorian
Virtual Emergency
Department



Nikhil Patinge
Director at Whole of
Victorian Government
Digital Integration
Services, Department of
Government Services



Matt Jones
CEO of Murray PHN



Kate Temby
General Manager, Strategy
and Partnerships, RWAV
and **Ravinder Kandra**
Manager, Analytics
and Reporting, RWAV
discussed the Rural
Health Workforce Census
2024 – Statewide Data

Conference panels

A panel discussion on the theme 'Working together, designing and innovating for workforce sustainability' was hosted by **Kellie O'Callaghan**, Chair, Mental Health and Wellbeing Interim Regional Body, with input from (L-R):

A/Prof Shabna Rajapaksa
Paediatrician, Co-Head of Paediatrics and Deputy Director (Subdean) for Medical Student Education in Ballarat, Rural Clinical School, University of Melbourne

Kara Di Dio
Director and Speech Pathologist, Kara Di Dio Speech Pathology

Stacy Doan
Student Occupational Therapy, Deakin University

Nola Andrews
Volunteer Consumer Advocate, Mansfield District Hospital

Matthew Grace
Director of Nursing, Mental Health and Wellbeing,
Albury-Wodonga Health

Dr Michael M Veal
The Trustee for Central Highlands Health Network.



A panel of experts was hosted by **Prof Grant Phelps**, RWAV Board Chair, with input from (L-R):

Kate Thwaites
Deputy Chief Mental Health Nurse, Director Mental Health Improvement, Safer Care Victoria

Anna Love
Executive Director, Clinical and Professional Leadership Unit,
Chief Mental Health Nurse, Safer Care Victoria

Dr Louise Reynolds
Chief Paramedic Officer, Safer Care Victoria

Prof Shane Bullock
Head of School, Monash Rural Health.



Roundtable conference learnings

Hosted by **Prof Grant Phelps**, RWAV Board Chair.

Reflecting on the conference discussions, delegates examined barriers, enablers, and opportunities, fostering a shared understanding of challenges and optimism for the future of rural healthcare.

Abstracts and posters

Eleven abstracts were selected for presentation across the 3 sub-themes throughout the conference, along with 15 posters that were displayed and discussed.

Policy perspectives and opportunities



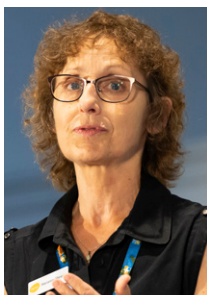
Dr Medhi Sanatipour OAM

Medical Director, GP supervisor, Sunraysia Medical Centre, *'Role of general practitioners in promoting National Bowel Cancer Screening Program in rural Victoria'*



Penny Smith

Volunteer Research Advisor, Wingaru Education, *'Who will care for our most vulnerable? Learning from newly arrived international health workers about their experience of working in a rural health service in Victoria, Australia'*



Marianne Shearer

Senior Associate Consultant, Larter Consulting, co-presenting with Julie Cairns – Loddon Children's Local / Bendigo Community Health Services, *'Loddon Children's Health and Wellbeing Local Partnership Development: Building one team and one service'*

Embracing data and technology



Dr Raymond Wen

Chief Growth Officer and Medical Director of Primary Care Services, Telecare Australia, presented by

Dr Ka Chun Tse

Director of Medical Services, Kyabram District Health Service, Dhelkaya Health, NCN Health and Rochester & Elmore District Health Service, *'Metro to Rural: Co-designing a hybrid GP service to support a rural health service'*



Linda Govan

Health Care Solutions Program Manager Building Nurse Capacity, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association, *'Factors influencing the recruitment and retention of Primary Health Care Nurses in rural and remote areas: an evidence-based approach'*



Patrick Quinlan

Data Analyst, Monash University, *'Data at the heart of rural health'*



Dr Vitor Rocha

Palliative Care Lead, Murray PHN and Board Director, Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Service and **Bree Jeffery** Coordinator – Complex and Integrated Care, Murray PHN, *'Cancer shared care in primary care, co-designed consumer and general practice pilot in regional Victoria'*

Working together, designing and innovating for workforce sustainability



Ainsleigh Whelan

Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, *'Developing a workforce pipeline. Strengthening allied health teams through cadetship, partnership and support workforce models'*



Dr Nerida Hyett

Murray PHN Sunraysia, co-presenting with **Penny Wilkinson** Northern District Community Health, *'Buloke Loddon Gannawarra Sustainable Rural Healthcare Hubs Innovative Model of Care Trial'*



Dr Brad Hodge

La Trobe University, *'Community based health checks: A complicated but worthwhile effort that benefits students and community'*



Ruth Hardman

Community Health Services, *'Can it be this easy? Improving access to care with Community Paramedicine: The CP@clinic program in Australian community health'*

Poster presenters

Gemma Bilardi, Echuca Regional Health
Daniel Baker, Bass Coast Health
Donna Gleisner, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association
Joelene Mitchell, Hume Health Services Partnership
Andrew Freeman, Hume Health Services Partnership
Isabelle Meyer, Dementia Training Australia
Nerida Dye, Campaspe Library Service, Campaspe Shire Council
Yvonne Fabry, Northern District Community Health Medical Clinic
Tara Jose, South Wangaratta Medical Centre
Robert Dawson, Monash Rural Health
Cristine Gibbins, Bendigo Community Health Services
Lyn Brett, GV Health
Sophie Turner, Department of Health
Gabriela Gauthier, Rural Workforce Agency Victoria
Kerina Princi, Rural Workforce Agency Victoria.

Event sponsors and partners



Workshops

Building a Thriving Business Workshop

The business workshop, delivered by Martin Eade from The Sales Strategist, equipped participants with a proven growth framework used by over 10,000 businesses worldwide, including medical and allied health sectors. Attendees tackled common challenges, clarified purpose and strategic priorities and left with a customised growth plan, to drive sustainable business success. Eligible participants were able to claim back their cost of attendance through the RWAV Business Training Grant.

Cultural Safety Training

The CST workshop offered health professionals an opportunity to meet CPD requirements through education and reflection, aligning with Ahpra's definition of cultural safety as an ongoing critical reflection to deliver safe, accessible and racism-free care determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Eligible participants were able to access reimbursements.

Student Meet-up

Student Meet-Up:

Future Health Careers - See page 23.



Photo: Martin Eade, The Sales Strategist, conducting the Building a Thriving Business Workshop at the RWAV Conference



Photo: Bonnie Chew, RWAV Cultural Consultant, Director Mirriyu Cultural Consulting & Balim Balim Dreaming, conducting Cultural Safety Training at the RWAV Conference



Photo: Conference delegates with RWAV Team and trade table sponsors at the RWAV Conference



RWAV Conference Outreach Breakfast Gathering

The RWAV Conference Outreach Breakfast Gathering welcomed 42 participants, including healthcare professionals and outreach stakeholders. The gathering recognised the vital contributions of outreach providers while showcasing the breadth of services available. It created an opportunity for connection, reflection and inspiration, shining a light on both the impact achieved and the future ambitions.

Photo: Attendees at the RWAV Conference Outreach Breakfast Gathering.

Media Coverage



Photo: Kara Di Dio, Director and Speech Pathologist at Kara Di Dio Speech Pathology interviewed at the RWAV Conference for WIN News.

The WIN Network attended and featured the RWAV Conference on its evening news broadcast. The segment included interviews with Lauren Cordwell, CEO of RWAV; Professor Jenny May AM, National Rural Health Commissioner; and Kara Di Dio, Director and Speech Pathologist at Kara Di Dio Speech Pathology, and RWAV Award winner.



Photo: Professor Jenny May AM, National Rural Health Commissioner, interviewed at the RWAV Conference for WIN News.



View the media interviews

<https://www.rwav.com.au/rwav-conference-2025-overview>
Videos courtesy of the © WIN Network.



Geelong Performing Arts Centre, venue of the 2026 RWAV Conference, Geelong

Your invitation to the



Beyond Boundaries and Building Futures in Rural Healthcare

4 - 6 March 2026

2026 RWAV Conference

Join us for the 2026 RWAV Conference, 'Beyond Boundaries and Building Futures in Rural Healthcare'. Explore new ideas, challenge old assumptions and work together to create healthcare systems that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

Be part of 3 transformative days of connection, innovation and inspiration as we explore the future of rural healthcare. From bold ideas to practical solutions, this is where boundaries are reimagined, and futures are built.

Register for the 2026 RWAV Conference here



<https://rwavconference.com.au/>

Sharing knowledge: Attending conferences and presentations

RWAV was represented at a number of conferences in 2024–25.

Victorian Rural Health Conference in Wodonga

RWAV proudly sponsored the welcome reception for the Victorian Rural Health Conference 2025 in Wodonga, where CEO Lauren Cordwell delivered a speech. RWAV's recruitment and outreach teams engaged with clinicians, registrars and students, strengthening relationships and gaining valuable insights into workforce challenges, locum experiences and rural career aspirations.



Photo: (L-R) Kas Rajarajan, GP Locum Program Coordinator, RWAV, with Dr Louise Manning, RWAV Board Director and RDAV President, and Jasmine Mannix, Program Coordinator – Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV, at the conference trade table.

Photo: RWAV CEO, Lauren Cordwell, delivered a speech at the Welcome Reception.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference 2025

This conference was held from 27–29 May on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar (Boorloo country). It focused on the theme 'Seeing Our Way' and brought together leaders to address eye health through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lens. The program featured policy, collaborative care and integrated health solutions. RWAV showcased key outreach programs, including the RHOF, the MOICDP, the VOS, and the EESS, reinforcing our commitment to improving long-term eye health outcomes for First Nations communities.



Photo: Joanne Huynh (left), Program Coordinator - Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV with Candace Marsden, Manager Outreach & Regional Services (right) at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference 2025.

General Practice Conference & Exhibition, Melbourne 2024

The RWAV team connected with healthcare professionals discussing career opportunities, grants and professional development tailored to the unique goals of health professionals at the RWAV booth.



Photo: RWAV's Gordana Kel (centre), Healthcare Access Administrator, Ben Trewarn, Team Manager - Health Professional Recruitment Team (right), and Kas Rajarajan, GP Locum Program Coordinator (not pictured), enjoyed discussing all things healthcare requirements with attendees (left).

ASOHNS Indigenous Ear Health Workshop – Sydney

In March 2025, RWAV Senior Program Coordinator, Candace Marsden, attended the ASOHNS Indigenous Ear Health Workshop in Sydney, connecting with ENT specialists and health professionals nationwide. The workshop explored Indigenous ear health through historical outreach efforts, emerging technologies such as AI for early detection, climate impacts, and culturally responsive care models. Key discussions highlighted the importance of rural exposure in ENT recruitment, challenges in regional practice and the role of training in building local capacity. The event also fostered valuable networking with sector leaders, reinforcing RWAV's commitment to improving Indigenous ear health and strengthening strategic partnerships.



Photo (L-R): Sowmya Rao, Senior Project Officer Screening and Early Detection, VACCHO at the ASOHNS Indigenous Ear Health Workshop in Sydney, RWAV's Outreach team's Candace Marsden, Manager Outreach & Regional Services with Sally Brugger, Senior Coordinator Health Access Services, Rural Doctors Network.

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) Conference

RWAV was delighted to sponsor the coffee cart at the SARRAH Conference. James Cousins, Recruitment Coordinator, RWAV, connected with attendees. Gabriela Gauthier, Allied Health Program Coordinator, RWAV, presented an abstract at the event. This inspiring conference celebrated innovations and strategies in rural and remote allied health.



Photo: James Cousins, Recruitment Coordinator, RWAV, at Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) Conference

Rural Medicine Australia Conference, Darwin

RWAV's General Manager Strategy and Partnerships, Kate Temby, and Manager of Strategy and Partnerships, Kerina Princi, attended the inspiring Rural Medicine Australia Conference in Darwin, hosted by ACRRM. The event brought together passionate healthcare professionals to explore rural workforce solutions, Aboriginal health and innovations in remote healthcare.

Congratulations to ACRRM on hosting this impactful event. We look forward to future collaborations!



Photo: Kate Temby (left), General Manager Strategy & Partnerships and Kerina Princi (right), Manager Strategy & Partnerships at RWAV meeting a wildlife handler (centre).



Photo: Kate Temby (left), General Manager Strategy & Partnerships and Kerina Princi (centre), Manager Strategy & Partnerships at RWAV with Jo-anne Chapman (right), CEO, General Practice Registrars Australia.

Primary Care Conference, Canberra

CEO Lauren Cordwell attended the Primary Care Conference in Canberra, hosted by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The event brought together healthcare leaders to discuss current and future healthcare strategies. During the conference, the Department's Secretary outlined priorities for the next 15 to 20 years, including a shift towards prevention and early intervention, addressing health equity, leveraging technology to improve access and enhancing system integration with appropriate incentives. These conversations will continue to shape our work into the future.



Photo: Attendees at the Primary Care Conference, Canberra.

The Otitis Media Australia (OMOZ) 2024 Conference, Newcastle

The OMOZ 2024 Conference showcased the importance of continued innovation in ear health, bringing together over 300 professionals, including researchers, surgeons and other healthcare practitioners, to tackle ear health issues, particularly in First Nations communities. RWAV fostered collaboration with key stakeholders to strengthen our outreach programs. Presentations focused on workforce challenges and strategies to boost First Nations representation in healthcare.

Photo: (L-R) Jasmine Mannix, Program Coordinator – Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV; Carleen Miller, Aboriginal Engagement and Project Coordinator, The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital; and Joanne Huynh, Program Coordinator - Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV at OMOZ 2024.



VACCHO Movement by Improvement – CQI Forum

This forum, in August 2024, brought together continuous quality improvement (CQI) experts and service delivery professionals from member organisations and partners. The event focused on workforce development, healthcare access and service delivery improvement, offering participants valuable opportunities to enhance their CQI skills.

RWAV hosted a stand, actively promoting its services and grant opportunities, and providing key information on outreach programs, recruitment and professional development. Our team engaged with stakeholders, shared best practices, and explored collaborations to strengthen quality and risk management frameworks. The forum offered RWAV valuable insights and opportunities to build partnerships and improve healthcare outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Photo: (L-R) Nicolle Dawson, Quality Improvement Advisor, RWAV; Cat Timcke, Clinic governance, VACCHO; Cher Twe, Manager Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV; and Joanne Huynh, Program Coordinator – Outreach & Regional Services, RWAV at the VACCHO Movement by Improvement CQI Conference.



National Rural Health Conference 2024

RWAV's General Manager of Service Delivery, Jo Willatts, attended the National Rural Health Conference in Perth, where she was inspired by the dedication of professionals working to improve healthcare in rural and remote communities. She emphasised the challenges these areas face, and the innovative solutions being explored.

RWAV works to enhance access to quality healthcare for rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria through tailored workforce solutions informed by partnerships and data.

Thank you to the National Rural Health Alliance for delivering an outstanding event. We look forward to future collaborations on transformative initiatives.

Australian Psychology Society conference



Photo: (L-R) Sarah Zivkovic, Program Coordinator, Health Professional Recruitment; Suzi Koene, RWAV Student Ambassadors & Psychologist; and Brad Hudson, Program Manager, Mental Health, representing RWAV at the Australian Psychology Society conference in August 2024.

Masters of Public Health student evening



Photo: Lauren Cordwell (far right), CEO, RWAV, with attendees at the University of Melbourne, Masters of Public Health student evening.

Investing in our people and systems

RWAV is supported by a team of 46 dedicated staff who bring a diverse mix of skills, experiences, and perspectives to the organisation. Together, they play a vital role in delivering programs and services that strengthen rural healthcare across Victoria.

Investing in our people is central to RWAV's success; the organisation fosters a workplace culture grounded in integrity, collaboration, and continuous improvement, where open communication and mutual respect guide everyday interactions. RWAV places strong emphasis on employee wellbeing and professional growth, empowering staff to develop their capabilities, take initiative, and contribute meaningfully to the organisation's mission.

This commitment was further demonstrated when RWAV staff and the executive team successfully negotiated a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, reinforcing fairness, transparency, and positive workplace relations. RWAV continues to build a supportive environment where every team member feels valued, engaged, and connected to the shared goal of improving health outcomes across rural and regional Victoria.

RWAV Staff Development Day

In August 2024, RWAV held a dedicated Staff Development Day designed to strengthen alignment with the organisation's core values: Respect, Resilience, Collaboration, Innovation and Accountability. The day brought together staff from across the organisation to reflect on how these values shape our culture, guide our decisions and support our collective mission to improve rural healthcare.

The program featured a welcome from CEO Lauren Cordwell, cultural sharing that acknowledged the importance of diversity and inclusion, and a series of engaging workshops and team-building activities. These sessions focused on translating organisational values into meaningful day-to-day behaviours, encouraging collaboration and fostering a deeper connection among staff.

The day provided an opportunity to celebrate the progress already made in building a positive, inclusive workplace, while also identifying new ways to further embed our values into everyday work practices. Staff gained a renewed sense of connection with colleagues and RWAV's overarching purpose.

Office relocation

In 2025, RWAV relocated from the World Trade Centre to its new home on Level 15, 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

This move marks an important step in our ongoing commitment to sustainability, cultural inclusion, staff wellbeing and community connection. The new location enhances our capacity to work collaboratively, embrace hybrid working and foster stronger relationships with key stakeholders, including the Victorian Department of Health.

It also supports greater operational efficiency and creates a welcoming, purpose-driven environment for our team.

We look forward to greeting our stakeholders at our new office and continuing our shared mission to improve healthcare outcomes for rural and regional communities across Victoria.

IT improvements

At RWAV, we are always working hard to ensure we can support health professionals with grants and financial incentives.

Grants assist health professionals in relocating to country areas and support travel costs for outreach services.

In the past year, RWAV has undertaken significant work to improve the IT infrastructure and cybersecurity that supports our grant administration processes. It is expected that this work will provide health professionals with an improved online system for applying for grants and enable RWAV to support healthcare access in rural Victoria.



Photo: New RWAV office at Level 15, 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

Environmental stewardship, social responsibility and corporate governance

Environmental stewardship

We work to minimise our environmental footprint through sustainability initiatives and waste reduction practices. These actions reflect our responsibility to reduce carbon emissions and energy use and contribute to a healthier Victoria. Throughout 2024–25, we set ambitious sustainability goals, including:

- reducing paper use by adopting a conference app with real-time updates, eliminating the need for printed programs and materials.
- using QR codes at external events in place of printed brochures, significantly cutting down on paper waste.
- encouraging staff to share and access resources through internal cloud-based technology, replacing printed handouts with digital collaboration tools.
- hosting the Victorian Rural Health Awards online and maximising the use of virtual meetings, further decreasing paper use and travel-related emissions..

RWAV also embraced more sustainable work practices and travel choices:

- hybrid working arrangements have helped reduce the environmental impact of daily commutes.
- public transport is prioritised, with trains regularly used for regional visits.
- RWAV maintains only one vehicle in its fleet, further limiting fuel use and emissions.
- the 2026 RWAV Conference will be hosted in central Geelong, close to major public transport links, making it easier for attendees to travel sustainably.

A major milestone in our environmental journey this year was the relocation to a new, environmentally friendly office. The building boasts a strong focus on sustainability.

RWAV staff now benefit from consolidated end-of-trip amenities, including bike storage; priority parking is available for small/hybrid cars and dedicated spaces are available for mopeds/motorbikes.

Importantly, the building offers outstanding environmental credentials:

5.5 NABERS Energy Rating



3.5 Star NABERS Water Rating



5 Star Green Star Office Design v3 energy-efficient lighting, recycled water systems and a refurbished lobby featuring 93% recycled materials.



93% 

A comprehensive waste management program includes quarterly audits, a colour-coded bin system, and staff engagement initiatives to drive responsible disposal behaviours.

RWAV remains committed to ongoing improvement in environmental sustainability.

Photo: New RWAV office at Level 15, 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne



Social responsibility

RWAV's commitment to social responsibility is reflected in how we deliver services, engage with communities, support our people, and uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct, safety and inclusion.

As detailed in our Statement of Commitment to Better Health for Rural, Regional and First Nations Communities in Victoria, we go beyond workforce solutions to advocate for long-term, systemic change where it's needed most. This includes recruiting and retaining health professionals through strong training and support, co-designing culturally appropriate healthcare solutions with local communities, partnering with organisations to expand impact and supporting innovative models that address service gaps.

RWAV also tackles the social determinants of health through research and community programs, uses data to uncover inequities and actively advocates for health equity across Victoria.

Reconciliation and cultural safety

We underline our commitment to reconciliation and self-determination through meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Key initiatives include:

- releasing our Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation, pledging to actively listen to First Nations voices, address systemic inequities and walk alongside communities in building a better future.
- collaborating with First Nations organisations to ensure culturally safe practices and inclusive service design.
- delivering CST for health professionals and RWAV staff across Victoria. This training forms a core part of our induction and is refreshed every 3 years to maintain relevance and impact.

We also celebrate cultural diversity by recognising significant events, reinforcing our role as a culturally responsive and inclusive organisation.

Privacy, data protection and program intelligence

We have a strong cybersecurity strategy to protect the privacy and security of all client and stakeholder data.

We continually enhance our systems to enable more secure and effective data collection and analysis. RWAV recognises the importance of safeguarding sensitive information. Tools such as the Victorian Rural Health Workforce Census and Snap Surveys generate critical insights that help uncover inequities across Victoria and inform responsive, community-centred program design.

Victorian Child Safe Standards

Child Safe Standards Training was delivered to Board members, staff and student ambassadors in accordance with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 (Vic). The training is designed to reflect diverse perspectives and impart the knowledge and skills to safeguard children and young people.

Modern Slavery Framework

RWAV has taken steps to identify risks of modern slavery within its supply chain and has commenced development of a Modern Slavery Framework, to be rolled out in the next financial year. This framework will guide RWAV's approach to identifying, mitigating and reporting risks related to situations where offenders use coercion, threats or deception to exploit victims and undermine their freedom.

Supporting the local community

During the 2025 RWAV Conference in Bendigo, RWAV donated pre-packaged lunches to support local people experiencing homelessness.

Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) and inclusive work practices

RWAV supports flexible working arrangements as part of its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA), and promotes diversity and inclusion through inclusive recruitment practices, safe feedback channels and whistle-blower protections.

The updated EBA includes a structured annual remuneration increase over the next 4 years to provide stability and security, along with revised classification descriptions that better reflect the evolving scope of roles across the organisation. Enhancements to leave and flexibility provisions include access to purchased leave, extended paid parental leave with continued superannuation contributions during unpaid periods, and paid cultural leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Compassionate leave has been expanded to include miscarriage and stillbirth, while dispute resolution procedures have been streamlined for faster, fairer outcomes. A gender equity statement reinforces RWAV's commitment to an inclusive and equitable workplace.

Quality, health and safety

RWAV continues to implement strategic safety and quality improvement initiatives that support operational excellence and staff wellbeing. Occupational Health and Safety is a top priority, supported by access to an Employee Assistance Program and a proactive Social Committee that organises staff engagement activities to build morale.

Key highlights include:

- appointing Safety Officers to lead a proactive safety culture.
- training a Return-to-Work Coordinator to support safe and sustainable employee reintegration.
- ergonomic assessments and consultations tailored to individual needs.
- mental health first aid training to enhance internal support mechanisms.
- launching the RWAV Safety Hub, centralising safety resources and tools.
- organisation-wide incident reporting training to improve safety awareness.
- manual-handling training to reduce physical risks across the organisation.
- driver safety training to equip 25 staff with essential road safety skills, given the organisation's frequent travel to rural and regional areas.

Employee recognition and development

- An Employee Recognition Program acknowledges innovation, teamwork and alignment with RWAV's values through peer and executive nominations, while length of service awards at 5 and 10 years celebrate long-term commitment.
- Dedicated funding and structured policies support access to professional development in areas such as cultural safety, coaching, mentoring, change management and driver safety.

Wellbeing and community

RWAV's relocation to new offices has contributed to enhancing employee wellbeing and workplace culture. The building precinct celebrates First Nations culture. Visual storytelling and Dreaming narratives by First Nations artists. These help foster cultural awareness, community connection, and a strong sense of belonging among RWAV staff and visitors.

Governance

Through sound governance and a culture of transparency, accountability, and responsibility, RWAV is committed to delivering services with the highest regard for quality and safety.

Policy Framework

RWAV maintains a strong Policy Framework designed to guide the development, review, and implementation of organisational policies and procedures. This framework promotes transparency, defines decision-making responsibilities, and ensures accountability throughout policy management.

Clinical Governance Framework

To enable the ongoing delivery of responsive, high-quality, and safe healthcare, the framework is complemented by a Clinical Governance Framework Implementation Plan that guides its operational rollout.

The framework is structured around **5 domains**:

1. Leadership and Culture

2. Consumer Partnerships

3. Workforce

4. Risk Management

5. Clinical Practice

Regular monitoring and continuous improvement efforts support these domains. By applying them across departments as needed, RWAV ensures the framework stays relevant, measurable, and effective for staff and stakeholders.

Stakeholder and Advocacy Framework

RWAV has in place a Stakeholder and Advocacy Framework that guides strategic decision-making and fosters positive partnerships that influence healthcare reform.

The framework outlines high-level principles that shape RWAV's approach to stakeholder engagement and advocacy. It also serves as an internal guide for identifying current and potential stakeholders with shared goals of improving rural, primary, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare. It also provides flexibility to address urgent priorities and advocacy topics.

During the year, RWAV achieved several key milestones under this framework, as detailed earlier in 'Advocacy and partnerships', notably our new Statement of Commitment to Better Health for Rural, Regional and First Nations Communities in Victoria, and our Statement on the National Allied Health Workforce Strategy. New strategic advocacy initiatives were also developed, with further objectives set for the upcoming year, guiding RWAV's ongoing work in rural healthcare advocacy.

Corporate governance

RWAV is a public company limited by guarantee and operates within a legislative framework comprising:

- Corporations Act 2001 (Cth).
- Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission Act 2012 (Cth).

Our commitment to corporate governance standards

The RWAV Board is committed to good corporate governance that is appropriate to RWAV's size and the complexity of our business.

The Board has established a governance framework for managing the company, which comprises appropriate internal controls, risk management processes, and governance policies and procedures.

We have adopted the Australian Institute of Company Directors Not-for-Profit Governance Principles, third edition released in April 2024, (the AICD Principles) and the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission Governance Standards (the ACNC Standards) as appropriate guides to good governance.

Purpose and strategy

RWAV's purpose is to provide effective and customised health workforce solutions for rural, regional, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria.

This purpose is supported by our strategic plan. Progress against the strategic plan is subject to regular review by the Board at scheduled Board meetings and designated strategy sessions with the leadership team at which the Board evaluates company performance against the strategy.

Board and management

Roles and responsibilities

A formal Board Charter sets out the responsibilities of the Board, the matters reserved for its decision, and the powers delegated to its committees. Core responsibilities include endorsing the strategic plan, approving annual budgets and business plans, and monitoring the organisation's performance against its strategic objectives. While the Board retains ultimate accountability for RWAV's governance and direction, day-to-day operations are delegated to the CEO and Executive Team.

Board committees

The Board has 5 standing committees:

- Audit and Risk Committee.
- People and Culture Committee.
- Governance Committee.
- Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee.
- Nominations and Remuneration Committee.

Each committee acts under terms of reference reviewed annually by the Board, which set out the committee's role, responsibilities, membership and operations.

Board composition and skills

The Board is made up of nine non-executive directors. To fulfil its responsibilities effectively, the Board collectively requires a blend of skills, experience, and personal attributes aligned with the organisation's business and strategy.

During the year, the Board reviewed and confirmed the skills and experience needed. Each director then assessed their competency against these areas, with the results forming a skills matrix that captures the Board's collective capabilities.

The Nominations and Remuneration Committee utilised this matrix to guide the director nomination process and support succession planning, ensuring both current and future skill requirements are met.

Director nomination and appointment

Directors are appointed for a 3-year term, with those wishing to continue required to seek reappointment at the end of each term. To ensure renewal of Board membership, directors may serve a maximum of 9 years (3 consecutive terms).

Each year, the RWAV Board undertakes a search for suitably skilled individuals for nomination to the Board. This process is supported by the Nominations and Remuneration Committee, which is independently chaired and comprises both RWAV directors and independent members.

Following assessment of applications and interviews with shortlisted candidates, the Nominations and Remuneration Committee recommends one candidate per vacancy.

Board diversity

The Board recognises the benefits of having a diverse Board and this is considered in determining the composition of the Board.

Independence of the Board

The Board Charter requires that a majority of directors be independent—that is, free from any business or other relationship that could materially affect their ability to exercise independent judgment.

In the 2024–25 financial year, all directors were assessed as independent in accordance with the Charter. The Company Secretary maintains a register of interests for all directors, and any conflicts are managed under the company's Conflict of Interest Procedure.

Organisational culture

The Board recognises that organisational culture is central to RWAV's success and fosters the desired culture through the behaviours of individual directors and the Board collectively. Culture is monitored via management reports to the Board and the People and Culture Committee, as well as through formal staff engagement surveys.

Whistleblower policy

In line with our ongoing commitment to promoting a culture of integrity, honesty, and ethical conduct, employees are encouraged to report any unlawful or unethical behaviour under the company's Whistleblower Protection Policy. The company has in place an independent reporting hotline.

Code of Conduct

The Board is committed to a high standard of ethical business behaviour and integrity at all times.

Accordingly, the Board has adopted a formal Board Code of Conduct, which sets out its expectations of conduct for the company's directors.

Directors are required to review and confirm their compliance with the Code of Conduct annually.

Risk management

The company's Risk Management Policy, Framework and Risk Appetite Statement are approved by the Board and reviewed annually to ensure they align with the company's purpose and strategy.

Under the Risk Management Framework, enterprise-wide risks are regularly reviewed by management and Board committees and reported to the Audit and Risk Committee. Identified risks are managed in accordance with the company's Risk Management Procedure, under which appropriate Executive Team members and senior managers are designated as risk owners, responsible for overseeing and addressing the risks assigned to them.

RWAV Board of Directors



Professor Grant Phelps

Board Chair

BMBS, MBA, FRACP, FRACMA, FAICD

Grant is a retired physician and gastroenterologist whose specialist clinical practice was in regional and rural Victoria. In the latter part of his career, Grant moved into management and leadership roles at organisational and system level, with a focus on clinical quality and clinical engagement. Having worked for government in several jurisdictions, Grant has held leadership roles in the national safety and quality agenda and has also held major professional level roles including a 2-year period as President of the Adult Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians from 2016–18. Grant teaches clinical governance with a focus on helping healthcare boards and executive teams understand this critical aspect of their work and consults to organisations on their clinical governance and clinical leadership. Grant is an experienced and qualified board director, having attained Fellowship of the Australian Institute of Company Directors in 2018, and until recently chaired a major sporting organisation.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Board Chair
- Governance Committee member
- Nominations and Remuneration Committee Member



Jane Poletti

Deputy Chair

LLB, BSc, MMgt (Strategic Foresight), GAICD

As a practising lawyer and business consultant, Jane has worked for many years with company boards and executives across a range of areas including IP commercialisation, SaaS businesses, healthcare products/services, privacy compliance, data/IT security, and strategy. As a commercial lawyer, Jane takes a risk management and pragmatic approach within a legal/ethical framework to analyse issues/problems to find acceptable outcomes. Jane has for over 8 years been General Counsel for ID (Informed Decisions) which business converts data into knowledge to help organisations make informed decisions about property as it relates to people and place. She has served over a 20-year period as a director on health-related boards including Breast Screen Victoria, Ballarat Health Services, Victorian Artificial Reproductive Treatment Authority and RWAV.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Deputy Chair
- Chair of the Governance Committee
- Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee Member

RWAV Board of Directors



Adjunct Associate Professor Morton Rawlin AM

Board Director

BMed, MMedSci, FRACGP, FARGP, FACRRM, DipPractDerm, DipMedHyp, DipFP, DipBusAdmin, GAICD

Morton is an experienced GP and medical educator. He is currently in clinical general practice in suburban Melbourne and previously practised in rural Victoria for 10 years. Morton is Chair of the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaborative and a past Chair of the Mental Health Professionals Association and is a board member of the Mental Health Professionals Network. He is also the Medical Director of the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Victoria and is a member of the RACGP Victoria Council.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Governance Committee Member
- Chair of Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee



Roger Chao

Board Director

BA (Hons), BEc, GradDipBus, MBA, FGIA, FAICD

Roger is a highly regarded expert in corporate governance, risk management and board strategy, with a career spanning the corporate, public and not-for-profit sectors. A Fellow of both the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Governance Institute of Australia, he advises boards on navigating complexity with clarity and integrity.

As a former CEO, entrepreneur and board chair, Roger has successfully scaled ventures, raised capital, and guided high-growth organisations through innovation and disruption. He contributes to director education as a course writer, facilitator and assessor for both the AICD and Governance Institute, mentoring the next generation of ethical and strategic leaders.

Roger's sector expertise includes health, education, AI, law enforcement, sustainability and emergency management. A frequent speaker, author and advisor, he is committed to strengthening governance as a foundation for high-performing, purpose-driven organisations.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee

RWAV Board of Directors



Dr Louise Manning

Board Director

BSci(Hons), DipLang, MD, FRACGP, FACRRM, DRANZCOG(Adv), GAICD

Louise is a rural GP obstetrician practising in a number of locations across Central Victoria where she delivers general practice, obstetric and sexual health services. After growing up in a small town, she has lived experience of the difficulties of accessing healthcare in rural and regional areas, and is dedicated to advocating for equitable health outcomes, regardless of geography. In addition to her clinical duties, she undertakes consulting, medical education and advocacy work. She is also a non-executive director and the current President of the RDAV. Louise recently returned to study in 2024 and is undertaking a Masters of Public Health through The University of Melbourne.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee Member
- Audit and Risk Committee Member



Dr Rosemary Kelly

Board Director

BCom, MPP, EdD, DipEd, Claritas/CFA Investment Certificate, MAICD

Rosemary has had a varied career as an academic teaching economics, public policy and industrial relations, and as a consultant, advocate, health union official and as a director. She brings strong governance and strategic skills to the Board, as well as knowledge and depth of experience in health policy, economics and investment.

Rosemary was a director of Aware Super for 9 years, from 2012 to 2021, and Chair of the Investment Committee for 3 years. She was a member of the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee, the Governance Committee and the Human Resources & Remuneration Committee, which she also chaired.

Rosemary is currently a member of the Investment Committee of Cbus, a major Australian superannuation fund.

She was the Secretary of the Victorian Psychologists Association Inc for 20 years and was Assistant Secretary and Secretary of the Medical Scientists' Association of Victoria, which counts dietitians and audiologists among its members.

Rosemary knows first-hand the difficulties in attracting and retaining health professionals in rural and regional Victoria.

Rosemary is a member of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, and a committee member of Quit Nukes.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Chair of the People and Culture Committee
- Governance Committee Member

RWAV Board of Directors



Mathew Muldoon

Board Director

CA, BEc (Acc), RITP, MAICD

Mat is a Chartered Accountant of 30 years standing with experience as an auditor, banker and registered liquidator. As a joint founding partner of a chartered accounting firm specialising in corporate advisory, business recovery and turnaround, valuations and forensics, Mat brings his considerable financial experience combined with the commercial learnings gathered running numerous businesses to the Board. Mat was a longstanding board member of Ballarat Community Health Limited and was a member and Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee while he was on the board and is well aware of the issues facing the health workforce in regional areas.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Audit and Risk Committee Member
- People and Culture Committee Member



John Biviano

Board Director

BAppSci, GradDipBus, MBus, GAICD, FIML

John is an experienced CEO and senior executive who has held many roles in various hospitals, in government (health department), and in professional associations related to healthcare. John was the CEO of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), where he had major involvement in the governance review, various sustainability in healthcare initiatives, Indigenous health and 'Building Respect' cultural improvement strategies. John's expertise encompasses leadership, strategic policy development, professional standards and government relations. At RACS, he led the college through the COVID-19 pandemic and oversaw the digitisation of a range of member offerings, including aspects of training. He remains a key advocate for good corporate governance and the need for leaner and competent skills-based boards. John is also on the board of the Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee Member
- People and Culture Committee Member

RWAV Board of Directors



Catherine McGovern

Board Director

BEd (Hons), BTheol, GAICD

For nearly 30 years, Catherine has worked as a consultant, senior executive, adviser and government relations specialist with a particular focus on health, social services, social policy and industry development. Catherine is currently Partner and Co-founder of Evaluate, an economics consulting company, where she is engaged in the evaluation and development of efficient and cost-effective services and policies, principally in relation to health and life sciences. Catherine previously worked in the health insurance and pharmaceutical industries with responsibilities for government relations, stakeholder engagement, policy development, regulatory affairs and communication in Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe. Catherine is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a past board member of Marriott Support Services, Melbourne City Mission and Victoria Legal Aid.

RWAV special responsibilities:

- Strategy, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Committee Member
- Audit and Risk Committee Member

Executive team



Lauren Cordwell

Chief Executive Officer

BHlthSci(Hons), MPH, PostGradDipMgt, GAICD

Lauren is the Chief Executive Officer at RWAV. She was appointed CEO in August 2023, after serving in various executive roles, including Acting CEO and General Manager Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement.

As an experienced senior executive and health policy analyst, Lauren seeks practical ways to improve access to quality healthcare in rural Australia.

Lauren has over 25 years of experience in health policy and workforce development. Her career is marked by a commitment to equitable healthcare and the development of initiatives that have lasting benefits.

At RWAV, Lauren's approach emphasises partnerships, data, technology and collaborative efforts with communities, health professionals and government agencies. She leads a team of smart, capable individuals who care deeply about making a difference to health outcomes.



Kate Temby

General Manager – Strategy and Partnerships

RN, GradDip(Health Promotion), PRINCE2, Mini MBA

Kate is a registered nurse experienced in health promotion and project management. Her people and program management skills enable her to be agile and adaptable while maintaining an outcomes focus on improving quality access to primary healthcare. Kate's extensive experience working with all levels of government, the community and stakeholders across the sector have provided her with insights into the challenges rural communities and health professionals face.

With her strengths in strategic leadership, stakeholder engagement and collaborative partnerships, Kate has led the design and delivery of many innovative and strategic health promotion and grants programs, supporting better access to health services, health information and activities across communities.

While at RWAV, Kate has led the transformation of the RWAV grants program, enhanced the administration of a number of programs and developed the RWAV allied health portfolio. She has also led the development of the RWAV research program of activities.

Executive team



Jo Willatts

General Manager – Service Delivery

Social Work (BA Hons), DipSW

With a background in social work and a proven track record in recruitment, project management and business development, Jo brings strategic leadership and extensive experience to the health, human services and state government sectors. She specialises in health professional recruitment and outreach initiatives, and 3GA programs.

Jo is dedicated to delivering innovative workforce solutions and strengthening clinical governance in support of RWAV's mission to improve healthcare accessibility across rural and regional Victoria. At RWAV, Jo led successful internal change projects and built strong, collaborative relationships with external stakeholders.

Passionate about uniting communities and driving positive change, Jo is committed to advancing rural healthcare in Victoria through strategic, sustainable and people-focused initiatives.



Shay Madzikanda

General Manager – Finance and Risk

Msc (Fin), FCCA, FGIA, CA

Shay possesses more than two decades of financial management and leadership experience across both commercial and not-for-profit sectors. He has held numerous finance and leadership positions in the United Kingdom and Australia, including roles as chief financial officer, general manager, commercial manager, finance manager and accountant.

His proven leadership abilities are supported by his fellowship with the Governance Institute of Australia, fellowship with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, membership with Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, a master's degree in finance, and an undergraduate qualification in accounting and finance.

In addition, Shay has resided and worked in rural Victoria, providing him with valuable insight into the workforce opportunities and challenges faced by businesses operating in regional communities.

Executive team



Martin Bede
Company Secretary
LLB BCom FGIA

Martin is a governance professional and lawyer with experience in private practice and in-house legal roles. He has been a company secretary for public and private sector organisations across a range of industries including VicTrack, Regis Healthcare Limited and Dairy Australia Limited. He holds Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Commerce degrees from the University of Melbourne, a Graduate Diploma in Applied Corporate Governance from the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA) and is a fellow of the GIA.

List of acronyms and initialisms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACHSM	Australasian College of Health Service Management
ACRRM	Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
ASOHNS	Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery
CPD	continuing professional development
CQI	continuous quality improvement
CST	Cultural Safety Training
EESS	Eye and Ear Surgical Support
ENT	ear nose and throat
GP	general practitioner
IMG	International Medical Graduate
MMM	Modified Monash Model
MOICDP	Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program
MP	member of parliament
non-VR	non-vocationally recognised
NRHSN	National Rural Health Student Network
OMOZ	Otitis Media Australia
PHN	Primary Health Network
RACGP	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
RAV	Rural Doctors Association of Victoria
RHOF	Rural Health Outreach Fund
RWAV	Rural Workforce Agency Victoria
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VOS	Visiting Optometrists Scheme

Financial reports

Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria Limited

ABN: 31 081 163 519

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$
Revenue	21,124,893	17,918,187
Projects and grants expense	(12,180,691)	(9,812,150)
Employee benefits expense	(625,957)	(5,779,010)
IT expense	(927,546)	(601,183)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(240,691)	(224,422)
Staff recruitment and development expense	(186,479)	(210,021)
Professional fees	(159,771)	(106,573)
Other expense	(828,150)	(878,292)
Interest expense - leases	(9,220)	(16,565)
Surplus for the year	332,774	289,971
Total comprehensive income for the year	332,774	289,971



Scan to view the full financial statements and auditors report here.

<https://www.rwav.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/RWAV-30-June-2025-Summary-Financial-statements.pdf>

Rural Workforce Agency, Victoria Limited

ABN: 31 081 163 519

Statement of Financial Position

As At 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,193,293	4,808,477
Trade and other receivables	308,474	228,119
Financial assets	15,644,137	12,892,983
Other assets	122,206	34,999
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	17,268,110	17,964,578
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Trade and other receivables	227,249	
Property, plant and equipment	53,449	49,130
Right-of-use assets	1,094,176	197,217
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	1,374,874	246,347
TOTAL ASSETS	18,642,984	18,210,925

	2025 \$	2024 \$
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	799,234	1,190,623
Lease liabilities	162,028	227,061
Short-term provisions	130,177	139,977
Employee benefits	567,773	376,581
Contract liabilities	10,342,329	10,851,488
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	12,001,541	12,785,730
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Lease liabilities	898,739	
Employee benefits	99,082	114,347
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	997,821	114,347
TOTAL LIABILITIES	12,999,362	12,900,077
NET ASSETS	5,643,622	5,310,848

EQUITY		
Retained surplus	5,643,622	5,310,848
TOTAL EQUITY	5,643,622	5,310,848

Our Impact Report is produced using recycled paper, contributing to our sustainability efforts.



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