

MEDIA RELEASE

Rural community comes together on health workforce crisis

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Health services in rural areas are always looking for fresh solutions to address the increasing challenges of recruiting and retaining health workers. The Integrated Health Network (IHN) Alliance— led by Murray PHN (Primary Health Network) is developing sustainable healthcare models for the region and addressing rural workforce issues together through an innovative rural health service partnership.

Donna Doyle, CEO of Boort District Health and member of the IHN Alliance, says this regional partnership is investigating innovative and promising models.

“The health services of Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra Shires have been experiencing similar issues for some time. So rather than working separately, in our own silos, we’re working together to design and trial new models of health care.

“This collaborative approach extends beyond the realm of health. We’re working with local government and educational organisations to sell the benefits of rural lifestyle, advocate on shared issues of housing and childcare, and to foster a local health and medical training pathways and career opportunities,” Donna said.

The Alliance has now released its first report, which shows the importance of co-design and understanding local health priorities and perspectives. *The Way Forward to Sustainable Rural Health* presents a clear and evidence-based roadmap that will help the region flourish.

Recommendations in the 28-page report include employment packages to entice more GPs to the region and a nurse practitioner model of care that has already been implemented and is already increasing access to primary care services in the region through clinics located in Boort, Charlton, Quambatook, and Kerang.

The report is timely given the pre-budget announcement made by Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mark Butler’s last Friday. Part of the rebuilding Medicare reforms announced, was the expansion of the nursing workforce to improve access to primary care

Murray PHN CEO Matt Jones argues that primary care needs urgent reform to build sustainability in the health system.

“What works in metro areas, does not work in rural and regional settings where we have critical workforce shortages,” he said.

“Not being able to see your GP in a suitable timeframe has a huge impact on rural people’s health.

“Rural GPs need more support, and nurse practitioners and allied health could assist more if the MBS funding models allowed it.”

Matt believes that PHNs should be funded to lead more rural co-planning networks that deliver place-based solutions, such as those presented in the report. He says these will help coordinate and build workforce and system capacity – “the Buloke Loddon Gannawarra trial is showing us how this can be done”.

To learn more about the project and to read the report, visit:
<https://www.murrayphn.org.au/sustainablelhealthproject/>

Some quotes from the report:

- *“I like small communities. I like the community feel. I like the fact that you actually can see that you make a difference. And you get to see your patients again. You'll get to meet them wherever you go. It can be a curse or a blessing, but it is nice to think, I've had a hand in this person getting back to being able to do that.” - Allied health professional*
- *“I do find rural general practice to be the true general practice, the real general practice, because you do feel the value of what you do here, by being able to get to know people, their families, their histories, and that being the hallmark or cornerstone of being a general practitioner is to really get to know the patient. It definitely helps manage their health better and is one of the main benefits of working long term in rural practice.” - GP*

About the IHN Alliance:

The Integrated Health Network Alliance (IHN) was formed in 2019 to focus on addressing the health needs of the Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra region. These include chronic conditions like diabetes, heart, respiratory, mental and oral health, and other needs of our ageing population. In 2022, the IHN Alliance launched its Sustainable Rural Health Project to begin addressing the gaps caused by workforce shortages. Using up-to-date research, the project is helping health services work with community to create and trial new services and strategies that encourage doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals to live and work in rural areas over the longer term. The IHN Alliance includes Murray PHN, Boort District Health, Inglewood & Districts Health Service, East Wimmera Health Services, and Northern District Community Health.

About Murray PHN:

Murray PHN is one of 31 PHNs (Primary Health Networks) around Australia working to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of rural and regional primary health care and service systems. We are leading the rural alliance primary healthcare co-planning groups for sustainable models. Across our region, we work with general practitioners (GPs), community health, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), pharmacy, aged care and allied health practitioners, and with acute services such as hospitals, specialists and emergency care.

The role of PHNs is to help to support and integrate the work of these important services to ensure that the people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time. In the Murray PHN region, which covers almost 100,000 sq km of regional Victoria, we work to develop and maintain sustainable models of primary health care for our communities.

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Report image

- https://www.murrayphn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SRHP_codesign_BLG_FB_V3.jpg