

Media release

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Rural doctors welcome Vic Gov health strategy

The Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV) have welcomed the focus on the need for targeted programs to build the numbers of healthcare workers in rural Victoria.

RDAV President Elect, Dr Louise Manning, said that after being mostly overlooked in the state election platforms, it was encouraging to see rural health featured in the Victorian Health Workforce Strategy (the Strategy).

“We were very pleased to see ***Strengthen rural and regional workforces*** as a key focus in the Strategy,” Dr Manning said.

“The current inequitable access to health services in rural Victoria needs urgent action, so it is high time that improving the capacity and distribution of the health workforce in regional and rural locations is targeted.”

The Strategy aims to improve capacity and distribution in rural and regional locations for equity in access to healthcare by:

- Fostering local talent pipelines in rural and regional locations by growing local training pathways
- Reviewing and refreshing incentives and enablers to attract and retain professionals in rural and regional settings.
- Exploring innovative employment models that support flexible careers and improve access to care.

“I will be meeting with Minister for Health, The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP, in the coming weeks to discuss the development of the Single Employer Model (SEM) for Victoria, which is one of the innovative employment models that is to be explored as part of the Strategy,” Dr Manning said.

“SEM, which aims to give doctors training as GPs and rural generalists (RGs) similar employment arrangements to doctors training in a hospital-based speciality, has the potential to make rural generalist jobs in Victoria much more attractive than the current contracting, fee-for-service, model.

“At the moment rural generalist trainees, despite their continuing work in hospitals, are not afforded the same employment arrangements and entitlements as their colleagues doing any other speciality training, even within the same hospital.

“This employment disadvantage means that doctors choosing to train as a GP or RG are not eligible for benefits such as paid parental leave, accrued sick leave, salary packaging benefits and paid study or exam leave.

“The decline in the number of new doctors choosing GP as a specialty clearly indicates that something has to change. Junior doctors have strongly told RDAV that the poor employment conditions for GPs is often a key deciding factor. This needs to be addressed,” Dr Manning said.

“It is great to see the issue of rural health workforce feature strongly in the Strategy, and RDAV will work closely with the Department to progress on each of the key action areas.”

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