

# SARRAH

Services for Australian  
Rural and Remote Allied Health

## Media Release

21 May 2021

### **The Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway: A promising strategy for building a fit-for-purpose rural and remote allied health workforce.**

The Commonwealth Government's announcement of \$9.6 million over three years to improve access to allied health services is a win for regional, rural and remote communities.

"This new Budget measure to support the expansion of the Pathway is a strategic investment and a welcome response to the previous National Rural Health Commissioner Professor Paul Worley's report on *Improving Access, Quality and Distribution of Allied Health Services in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia*", said Cath Maloney, CEO of Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH). "It complements other measures, including aged care reforms, new MBS case conferencing items and the extension of telehealth services for allied health professionals. These are crucial steps to improve access to much-needed allied health services for all Australians."

The Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway supports early career allied health professionals to complete a training pathway that includes formal post-graduate education in rural generalist practice. The new funding will provide up to 90 workplace training packages to attract and retain allied health professionals, in rural and remote Australia, where services are in very short supply. Thirty packages are allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health organisations, providing vital services that are culturally safe and responsive. Further, the initiative includes 30 Allied Health Assistant (AHA) packages that will provide skills, training, local jobs and career pathways, while supporting viable practices and allied health services capacity in under-serviced communities.

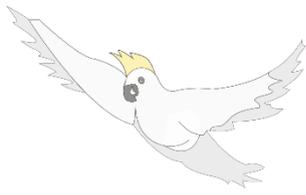
The investment announced in the 2021-22 Budget coincides with publication of a new [research study](#) that examined the Rural Generalist Program. The Rural Generalist Program is a two-level post-graduate course offered by James Cook University that aligns with the training requirements of early career allied health professionals in rural generalist training positions. The study, undertaken by a team of researchers from 4 universities across QLD, Victoria and WA, and with funding contributed by the Allied Health Professions' Office of Queensland, Queensland Health, found the Program is a promising strategy to build a fit-for-purpose rural and remote allied health workforce, when implemented as a component of the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway. The researchers found that benefits for the trainee, service and consumers were maximised when the three elements of the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway were implemented together: a formal education program, an employment structure that enables training and support, and an organisation that is committed to rural generalist workforce and service models.

The Pathway has been developed through a collaboration between several state and territory government health services, with resourcing and coordination provided by Queensland Health. Over the past 18 months SARRAH has been implementing a pilot to test the applicability of the Pathway in non-government services. "Our experience is that the Pathway can help address the same challenges in non-government and community settings" said Cath.

Continued expansion of the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway is gaining momentum nationally through the recent Commonwealth Budget announcement and through initiatives in state and territory government

**Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health**

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services. The Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway was embedded in Queensland Health through its 2019 enterprise agreement, and has been integrated into the Draft South Australian Rural Allied Health Workforce Plan (2021). Liza-Jane McBride, Queensland's Chief Allied Health Officer, acknowledges the substantial commitment and contribution of industry stakeholders in the development of the pathway. "QLD Health has been working collaboratively with stakeholders since 2013 to build the pathway as a key strategy to improve workforce sustainability and capacity, and enhance consumers' access to care in rural and remote areas. It is pleasing to see the pathway expanding nationally and across sectors and settings. There is significant need for allied health professionals who are highly skilled generalist practitioners in their profession, and the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway can help rural and remote health services attract and retain this workforce."

The funding injection is evidence that the government recognises the growing support for the program which has been developed through extensive consultation with practitioners, services, universities, professions and peak bodies and sends a signal about the value of the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway to the sector.

Dr Faye McMillan, Deputy National Rural Health Commissioner, said the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway delivers on Australian Government objectives in rural workforce planning, training, distribution, capacity and primary care reform. "Investment in the Pathway is part of the Government's recent rural workforce budget announcements, and will deliver access to high quality, safe, effective and efficient services close to home", said Dr McMillan.

"Expanding the Pathway will help more people access the services they need when and where they need them; whether it is mental health care, or help walking or swallowing after a stroke or accident, maintaining independence as you age, or as a parent making sure your child gets the expert support they need to have their best chance in the future," said Cath. "This initiative will help those living in rural and remote Australia gain access to these important services."

**Please direct interviews and media enquiries to:**

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SARRAH is the peak body representing rural and remote allied health professionals (AHPs) working in public, private and/or community settings SARRAH advocates on behalf of rural and remote Australian communities. SARRAH maintains that every Australian should have access to health services wherever they live, and the allied health services are fundamental to the well-being of all Australians.

SARRAH represents 27 different allied health professions, including: Audiology; Medical Imaging; Paramedics; Chinese Medicine; Nuclear Medicine; Pharmacy; Chiropractic; Radiation Therapy; Physiotherapy; Dental and Oral Health; Health Promotion; Podiatry; Dentistry; Occupational Therapy; Prosthetics; Dietetics and Nutrition; Optometry; Psychology; Diabetes Education; Orthoptics; Speech Pathology; Exercise Physiology; Orthotics; Social Work; Genetic Counselling; Osteopathy; Sonography

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