

Annual Report

2023-2024

Healthy rural communities with
access to high quality healthcare





Government of **Western Australia**
WA Country Health Service

Rural Health West is proudly funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and WA Country Health Service.

Rural Health West acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the many traditional lands and language groups across Western Australia and their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Kaya

We are honoured to support health professionals in their efforts to improve the health and well-being of country communities.



18 and 19 November 2023
Aboriginal Health Conference.

Healthy rural communities
with access to high quality
healthcare.

Our vision

Community

We strive to ensure rural communities have access to quality health services.

Integrity

We do the right thing, always.

Innovation

We embrace change and strive for improvement.

Accountability

We value the trust placed in us by our customers, our partners and our funders.

Our values

Our actions

Our mission

Ensure all rural communities in Western Australia (WA) have ready access to qualified and experienced health professionals.

- We deliver results for rural communities and our funders.
- We work collaboratively with partners because the health system is complex and no single agency can address all issues.
- We engage with and respond to the needs of rural communities.
- We base our strategies on evidence and ensure we keep informed of latest trends and developments in health.
- We invest in the development of our staff, ensuring they are capable and motivated to deliver results for rural communities and health professionals.

The team at Rural Health West is always so helpful. It's hard to keep up with all the incentives and things, but you guys do an amazing job, and there are a lot of doctors and health professionals that are still in this town because of your support.

Having long term staff here has a significant impact on patient centred care and culturally appropriate care, rather than relying on locums. Your organisation is making a big difference.

Gp incentive recipient

Chairman's report

It is with great pride that I present this report on what has been another productive year for Rural Health West. Reflecting on the past twelve months, I continue to be impressed by the dedication, professionalism, and passion of the entire Rural Health West team. Their commitment to delivering on our vision – healthy rural communities with access to high quality healthcare – has never faltered, despite the increasing demands and complexities of the health sector.

At the heart of this success is the strong partnership between the Board and management team. Our Board comprises members who bring diverse skills, perspectives, and expertise to the table. While we often come to discussions with differing views, it is our shared commitment to the mission of the organisation that allows us to work together with cohesion and clarity.

Over the past few months, we have been working to develop our new strategic plan, which will set the course for Rural Health West over the next three years. There's a lot going on in our space; workforce shortages, an evolving policy landscape, and shifts in community needs are just some of the factors that will shape the way our organisation operates in coming years. However, the Board is aligned with the management team in seeing these as opportunities to innovate, deepen partnerships, and enhance the impact of our work.

As we look forward to this next period, I acknowledge the impending departure of our Chief Executive Officer, Tim Shackleton, who has been at the helm for nearly nine years.

During Tim's tenure, Rural Health West has strengthened its position as a trusted and reliable partner in the sector. Tim's ability to navigate complex issues, while building and consolidating strong relationships across the health landscape, has been instrumental in solidifying Rural Health West's role as an honest broker, particularly in advocating for rural health needs.

Under Tim's leadership, the organisation has fostered deep, lasting partnerships and ensured we remain at the forefront of discussions regarding rural health workforce issues. On behalf of the Board, I thank Tim for his dedication and the contributions he has made to Rural Health West. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours; however, as a long-time champion for country WA, I suspect he won't be too far away.

In addition, I extend a heartfelt farewell and thank you to Liane Papaelias, our outgoing Company Secretary, and Cathy Bolt who each completed their Board tenures in October 2023. I've valued their expertise, commitment, and passion over the years.

At the same time, I am delighted to welcome two new Board members, Tanvi Haria and Matthew Tweedie. Tanvi and Matthew bring a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives that will help us to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the future.

As we look to the future, the Board is confident that Rural Health West is well positioned to continue its important work. We remain focused on our mission, committed to our values, and determined to support rural health professionals and the communities they serve. It is through the huge efforts of our talented staff, strong leadership team, and engaged Board that we will continue to thrive.

Thank you to everyone involved in making this past year such a success, and here's to the opportunities that lie ahead.



Hon. Terry 'Tuck' Waldron.

RURAL HEALTH WEST BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023-2024

Hon. Terry 'Tuck' Waldron
Chair

Liane Papaelias
Company Secretary
(Term completed October 2023)

Tanvi Haria
Company Secretary
(Appointed October 2023)

Associate Professor Mathew Coleman
Health Professional Director
(Medical practitioner)

Chantal Bachere
Health Professional Director
(Nursing and Midwifery representative)

Cathy Bolt
Deputy Chair and Independent Director
(Term completed October 2023)

Associate Professor Karen Bradley
Independent Director

Cr Liz Guidera
Country Local Government Director

David Rigby
Health Professional Director
(Allied health)
(Appointed Deputy Chair October 2023)

Dr Stephanie Trust
Health Professional Director
(Medical practitioner)

Matthew Tweedie
Independent Director
(Appointed October 2023)



Chief Executive Officer's report

As I reflect on the past year, I am proud of the many achievements Rural Health West has made in advancing rural healthcare and supporting health professionals across WA.

Of critical importance, was the renewal of our service agreement with WA Country Health Service through the Rural Health Partnership Initiative. This agreement reaffirms the strength of our long-standing partnership and underscores the critical role that Rural Health West plays in supporting the rural health workforce.

Through this initiative, we have ensured that rural health professionals have access to quality, relevant education and professional development opportunities. Our team works hard to ensure that we are delivering relevant and timely training to support clinicians work across their full scope of practice in caring for country communities.

Our recruitment programs have also seen strong results over the past year. With ongoing workforce shortages impacting rural and remote areas, our ability to attract and place health professionals remains vital. The success of these programs is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team, who continue to go above and beyond to match the right health professionals with the communities that need them the most.

Additionally, we continue to promote rural health as a rewarding and viable career path to the next generation of health professionals. Through a variety of initiatives, we aim to inspire health students and new graduates to consider rural practice as their future. This work is essential to building a sustainable rural workforce and addressing the long-term challenges we face in providing healthcare to regional communities.

Our outreach programs continue to ensure that the right health services are provided in the right location, allowing communities to access the care they need locally, without the burden of long-distance travel. Our staff expertly manage a multitude of service providers and coordinate thousands of provider visits each year, delivering these programs with professionalism, efficiency, and a deep commitment to meeting the healthcare needs of rural and remote communities.

Advocacy has been an increasingly important area of focus for Rural Health West. A cornerstone of this work in 2024 was the WA Rural GP Summit, held in March. This event brought together a cross-section



Tim Shackleton.

of industry stakeholders, including rural GPs, policymakers, and sector representatives, to address the challenges and opportunities facing rural general practice. The Summit was well attended and successful in elevating rural general practice on the list of priorities for those present. It provided a much-needed platform to discuss the pressing issues impacting rural healthcare delivery, and I believe it has set the stage for future reforms.

None of these efforts would be possible without the teams working tirelessly behind the scenes. The contributions of our workforce data, finance, administration, and communication teams are critical in supporting our frontline services. These teams provide the essential infrastructure that allows us to deliver on our mission, ensuring that our decisions are data-driven, our operations are efficient, and our communications are effective. Their work may not always be visible, but it is indispensable to the success of Rural Health West.

As this will be my final report as Chief Executive Officer of Rural Health West, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude. It has been a privilege to serve in this role for the past nine years, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the interactions and collaborations with people throughout the sector. The dedication and passion of the individuals I have had the pleasure of working alongside have been inspiring, and I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved together.

I believe that Rural Health West is in a strong position to continue its important work, and I have every confidence in the Board, leadership team and staff to navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

It has been an honour to lead this exceptional organisation, and I wish Rural Health West continued success in the future.



Dr Gareth Broberg

GP, Great Southern
Recruited by Rural Health West

Partnerships and collaborations

Our strategic partnerships and collaborations strengthen our capacity to inform and influence relevant policy, reduce duplication across the industry and provide an avenue for more effective service delivery.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support and collaboration of the following organisations with whom we have worked throughout 2023-2024.

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS)
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra)
- Australian Medical Association (WA) (AMA WA)
- Metropolitan health service providers
- National Rural Health Commissioner
- Postgraduate Medical Council of Western Australia (PMC WA)
- Regional Development Commissions
- Royal Flying Doctor Service WA
- Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA)
- Rural Workforce Agency Network (RWAN)
- St John of God Bunbury Hospital
- The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
- The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia (RCSWA)
- The University of Western Australia
- University Departments of Rural Health
- WA Country Health Service
- WA Primary Health Alliance
- Western Australian Department of Health
- Western Australian Government
- Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) and country local government authorities
- Western Australian Universities



Just a quick email to again thank you for the great work you and Rural Health West do. I originally moved down to Albany in 2013 with relocation support from Rural Health West without any intention on setting up down here permanently. We have the greatest life down here and we've never looked back. I've also had professional development support along the

way and the letter of support from Rural Health West helped us with our Regional Economic Development (RED) application to now start our new build which will improve healthcare services and supply in the Great Southern.

I will send you an invite when we are ready to open our doors and would love to see you down here again.

I am definitely keen to pursue a post graduate Masters and will look into the scholarships. I've always wanted to finish that level of study. It would be great for the region and really help with attracting staff in recruitment and retention if I can be more highly specialised.

David Scriven

Practice owner, Ocean Beach Physio, Denmark



I am incredibly grateful to Rural Health West for providing exceptional support especially in recruiting a GP for our medical practice. The team has been very professional, dedicated and supportive with ongoing assistance through the process of recruitment.

They have not only helped find the right candidate but also demonstrated their commitment to rural healthcare which is highly commendable. You can be assured of prompt response and a sense of reassurance when you put a call through or email Leeanne and Georgie.

I highly recommend Rural Health West for their outstanding service and unwavering support to rural healthcare.

Dr Adewale Olatunji (Olat)

Wheatbelt GP



Health professionals recruited 2023-2024





Delivering comprehensive recruitment and locum support across WA

At Rural Health West, we prioritise our efforts based on insights from the annual Health Workforce Needs Assessment (HWNA), a comprehensive tool that informs our service delivery by identifying key health workforce priorities and community needs across rural WA.

By capturing extensive quantitative and qualitative data, along with regular consultations and stakeholder engagement, the HWNA provides a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by rural communities.

Our focus is directed towards addressing the persistent and emerging trends highlighted by the HWNA. These include the significant challenges posed by WA's vast and remote landscape, the fragility of small and solo general practices, and the ongoing maldistribution of the health workforce, particularly GPs. Specific regions consistently identified through the HWNA are prioritised for targeted recruitment, locum support, and workforce development activities.

Rural Health West's recruitment initiatives deliver robust solutions to foster and support primary care delivery throughout rural and regional WA. We offer a wide range of essential services for prospective candidates, providing access to a broad spectrum of job opportunities.

Employers benefit from a streamlined, fee-free recruitment process. Committed to candidates' success, we customise our approach to match individual skills, experiences, cultural sensitivities, family needs, and career ambitions. Our services include personalised career guidance, interview preparation, assistance with the registration process, insights into workforce programs, and advice on legislative matters.

Additionally, we assist in securing provider numbers for eligible doctors, and offer relocation and retention incentives to ensure a smooth transition and improved staff retention. Our commitment extends beyond placement, maintaining ongoing engagement with placed professionals.

Our team consistently collaborates with practices, community health organisations and ACCHS to provide unwavering support to health professionals. This approach has yielded exceptional results in health professional recruitment during 2023-2024, with 132 health professionals placed in communities across WA.

Of these, 53 were permanent GPs. Remarkably, more than 40 per cent of these doctors were placed in remote and very remote communities classified as Modified Monash Model (MMM) 5-7 locations. Additionally, nine doctors were recruited to priority areas identified in the Health Workforce Needs Assessment (HWNNA), including placements in the Pilbara, Goldfields, and Wheatbelt regions.

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) continue to play a critical role in the rural general practice workforce across WA, with 52 per cent of rural GPs having completed their medical degrees overseas. During the financial year, 90 per cent of the GPs recruited by Rural Health West were IMGs, 45 of whom were entering their first GP roles in Australia.

To equip new recruits for success, Rural Health West conducted 19 in-depth orientations with newly arrived GPs, ensuring they have a thorough understanding of the Australian healthcare system, professional practice, and cultural safety within an Australian context.

Non-Fellowed GPs receive support through programs such as the More Doctors for Rural Australia Program (MDRAP), which was closed to new applicants in March 2024 and replaced by the Pre-Fellowship Program (PFP). These programs enable non-Fellowed GPs to access Medicare billings while receiving appropriate supervision and development as they progress towards Fellowship training. During the financial year, we supported 38 doctors on MDRAP and welcomed two doctors into the PFP upon its launch in April 2024.

Rural Health West also worked with 24 GPs under the Five Year International Medical Graduates Recruitment Scheme, as they fulfill their moratorium while delivering medical care to rural communities across WA.

In addition to doctors, Rural Health West recruited 79 nurses, midwives, dentists, and allied health professionals. Our commitment to supporting the most underserved communities ensured that over half of these health professionals were placed in MMM 5-7 locations, with 31 assigned to priority areas such as Jigalong, Karratha and Tjuntjuntjara.

In our pursuit of improving healthcare accessibility, Rural Health West's GP locum program focuses on retaining rural doctors by providing essential GP locum relief for leave and addressing workforce shortages.

Our comprehensive suite of services includes a fee-free, end-to-end recruitment process encompassing administrative tasks, vacancy briefs, Medicare assistance, and credentialing support. Additionally, we provide placement coordination, grant management, and ongoing support to ensure smooth transitions for health professionals and practices.

During the financial year, Rural Health West facilitated 2,276 days of GP locum coverage, with an impressive 86 per cent of these locum days provided in MMM 5-7 locations, equating to the equivalent of placing 9-10 additional GPs across rural WA.

Consistent with our mission to support the communities most in need, 34 per cent of GP locum days were delivered in locations identified in the HWNA, such as Hedland, Kalgoorlie, Newman, and Meekatharra. Additionally, 65 per cent of total GP locum days were provided in ACCHS.

Our ongoing efforts continue to bridge healthcare gaps and provide vital support to practices and communities throughout rural WA.

Recruitment in the regions



Case studies:

Tailoring recruitment solutions for success

Alongside our traditional recruitment efforts, we recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach falls short in addressing the distinct challenges of rural healthcare. We are proud of our long history of finding solutions to ensure country communities have access to quality healthcare.

Following are examples of our innovative ways of working to develop solutions for communities in need.

Shire of Gnowangerup Great Southern

Together with the Shire of Gnowangerup, Rural Health West successfully navigated the challenges faced by the community when their resident GP relocated unexpectedly.

Recognising the critical need to ensure continued healthcare services in this small inland community, we met with the Shire to provide strategic advice on their options for replacing the GP and helped develop a tender application.

We also assisted the Shire to screen potential candidates.

A new provider was selected and commenced within three months of the prior GP departing, which was a positive result given widespread GP shortages.

Spinifex Health Service Tjuntjuntjara Aboriginal Community, Goldfields

In early 2023, Spinifex Health Service, which services the remote Tjuntjuntjara Aboriginal community, faced a staffing challenge with several key personnel departing. Rural Health West has supported the community since this time, sourcing interim staff ensuring ongoing healthcare services for several months.

This effort continued until we were able to successfully recruit several permanent nursing staff.

Tjuntjuntjara is considered to be one of the most remote communities in the world and travelling to the community is complex and time-consuming, which can act as a disincentive for visiting health staff.

Spinifex Health Service and Rural Health West successfully advocated for an exemption so that the health service could access Medicare billing, in addition to offering a workforce support payment for visiting GPs through the outreach programs.

This exemption was granted in recognition of the extreme remoteness and unique circumstances of the community.

Rural local government

in partnership with WA Local Government Association

Throughout the financial year, Rural Health West collaborated with WALGA to investigate the extent to which rural local governments are providing financial and in-kind support to attract and retain general practice services for their communities.

A statewide survey, undertaken in August 2023, found that 48 local governments reported providing support to general practice services at a combined net cost of \$5.2 million. The survey also uncovered that this issue is concentrated in small inland communities, with local governments in the Wheatbelt region responsible for \$4.4 million net investment into general practice services.

Rural Health West and WALGA have committed to advocate for a range of reforms to reduce this financial impost on rural residents in retaining primary healthcare services in their communities.

Community Health

Workforce Planning

Throughout the year, we have committed to primary care health workforce planning for country WA, initially focusing on areas with a history of service and workforce disadvantage.

An initial scoping exercise determined that such a project should be undertaken in conjunction with WA Country Health Service. In early 2024, the Collaborative Workforce Planning Program group was established and is now meeting on a monthly basis.

Key activities of this group include:

- Sharing of relevant workforce information.
- Identification of high risk regions.
- Collaborative recruitment and retention marketing opportunities.
- Identification of strategic workforce opportunities.

The aim is to extend and adapt our workforce supply strategies, with a focus on ensuring vital services for vulnerable communities.



Impact on the ground:

Emma Campbell



Emma Campbell, a podiatrist based at Karratha Central Healthcare, began her first role in rural WA in April 2024.

Initially drawn to the position due to its unique and challenging scope, Emma transitioned from her previous job in Perth to join her partner, who was working in a fly-in, fly-out basis within the region.

“We fancied a change, and I knew this job would be completely different from anything I had done before,” Emma shared, highlighting the broader scope of practice, particularly in wound care, which was new to her.

Emma’s move to Karratha was supported by Rural Health West, who reimbursed her relocation expenses and provided funding for professional development opportunities.

She is thriving in her role at Karratha, where she enjoys the variety and impact of her work.

“Rural Health West funded my trip back to Perth, covering flights and accommodation for my partner and I to attend the Aboriginal Health Conference,” she noted.

During this visit, she also participated in a wound care day and engaged in learning at Royal Perth Hospital.

In addition to these opportunities, Emma received mentorship funding to collaborate with Royal Perth Hospital on wound care patients.

“I had never worked with funding like this before or ever thought I could access it, so it has been amazing for me,” Emma said.

“Rural Health West funding has allowed me to do courses and professional development that will directly benefit the rural community.”

Dr Monize Vargas



Brazilian doctor Monize Vargas is thrilled to be living and working in the beautiful South West region of WA.

Monize is one of 53 new GPs who have been recruited by Rural Health West during the financial year.

“It’s taken about two years to get to WA,” said Monize.

“There have been so many steps to take, but we are here now and very happy.”

Monize, her husband and daughter now call Bunbury home after migrating from Pindorama, a town of 17,000 people in southern Brazil.

“I was one of only two GPs for the community and we had to practise all types of family medicine including obstetrics and some minor surgery.”

Monize, said her family has adjusted well to their new home.

“I’ve always worked in rural medicine, but Bunbury is huge compared to where we come from, which has been a bit of a surprise.”

Dr Lin Arias

Dr Lin Arias is one of a core group of dedicated GPs making significant contributions to rural healthcare across WA via the Rural Health West GP Locum Placement Service.

This year, Lin completed 11 locum placements, totalling 128 days – a testament to her commitment, as she had also filled 100 days the previous year. Her work has primarily taken her to remote areas such as Kununurra, Tom Price, Paraburdoo, and Leinster, where she has been at the forefront of addressing First Nations health issues.

Lin is known for her flexible approach to locums, often breaking up her stints and moving between locations. One of her favourite places to work is Esperance, where she spent 62 days this year. This mobility allows her to bring her expertise to various communities, helping to alleviate the healthcare shortages that many rural areas face.

Reflecting on her experiences, Lin describes rural locums as a return to the passion and joy she felt during her early years in medicine.



She fondly recalls how rural placements as a medical student or GP registrar offered opportunities to learn procedures that might not be encountered in urban hospital rotations and the chance to explore Australia's unique landscapes.

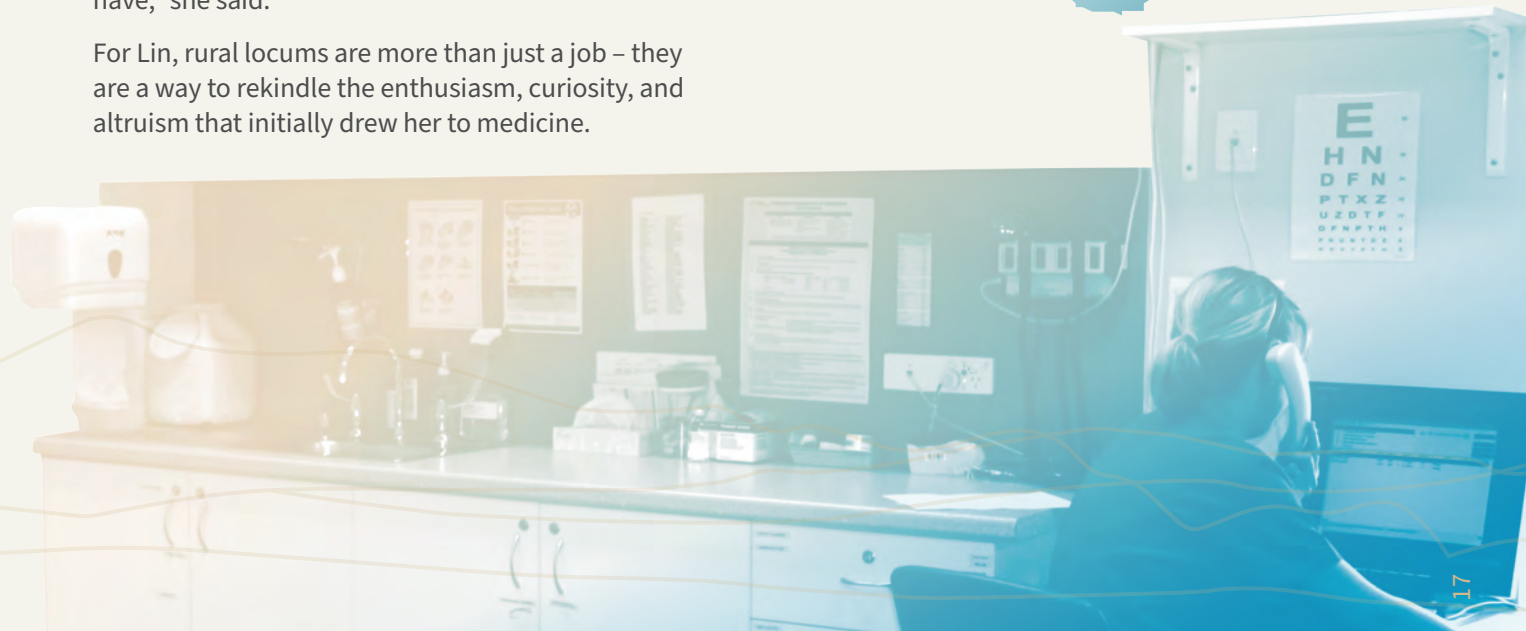
“Being a GP locum is truly the most fun a doctor can have,” she said.

For Lin, rural locums are more than just a job – they are a way to rekindle the enthusiasm, curiosity, and altruism that initially drew her to medicine.

Recruitment placements in priority areas of:

- 1 Boulder
- 6 Kalgoorlie
- 9 Karratha
- 1 Kondinin/Kulin
- 1 Merredin
- 3 Newman
- 1 Port Hedland
- 3 South Hedland
- 4 Roebourne
- 2 Tjuntjuntjara

31





Narrogin farm visit during the Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion program.



We didn't start the fire, Brookton participants.



Briefing for the medical students visiting Brookton.



Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion program attendee.



ROAR participants developing their skills in Kings Park, Perth.



Medical students during the Kimberley immersion (Credit: Richard Riley).



Developing tomorrow's healthcare heroes

Rural Health West is committed to cultivating a passion for rural healthcare among students and early-career health professionals. Throughout the year, we provided rural immersion experiences, financial assistance for attending clinical placements and rural health events, and highlighted the benefits of pursuing rural careers.

In July 2023, Rural Health West once again organised and hosted the Careers Expo for penultimate-year allied health students at Curtin University. This event attracted 160 students and 46 health sector employers and representatives. The Expo aimed to help aspiring health professionals build and expand their networks while connecting with potential employers. It featured a diverse lineup of speakers from various professions and sectors, including aged care, rehabilitation, private practice, hospital-based care, and both rural and metropolitan settings.

Also in July 2023, we took ten medical students to the small Wheatbelt town of Brookton for a weekend immersion. These students had missed the earlier Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion Program. This tailored experience ensured they had an opportunity to experience the vibrancy and strong sense of community found in small towns across WA's countryside.

In August 2023, Rural Health West supported The University of Notre Dame – Australia in conducting an immersion program in the Kimberley for second-year medical students. The program aimed to deepen students' understanding of rural patient needs, help them establish future networks, and allow Kimberley residents to influence the careers of future doctors.

March 2024 saw our collaboration with The University of Notre Dame – Australia, Curtin University, and fourteen shires for the Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion Program. This initiative provided 200 medical students with four-day immersion experiences across fourteen rural communities, where they explored local health services, engaged in teddy-bear clinics at schools, and participated in cultural activities.

Another significant achievement was the continuation of dental student placements in remote Western Australia, which began in 2023. This program expanded opportunities for dental students beyond Bunbury, previously the only rural placement option, with placements occurring in Derby, Newman, and Roebourne in May 2024.



Kimberley immersion participants catching crabs.

Throughout the year, we awarded grants to 123 allied health students, offering financial relief as they completed clinical placements in rural areas. Feedback from recipients indicated that this funding not only alleviated the stress of being away from home but also provided valuable exposure to the opportunities available in rural locations.

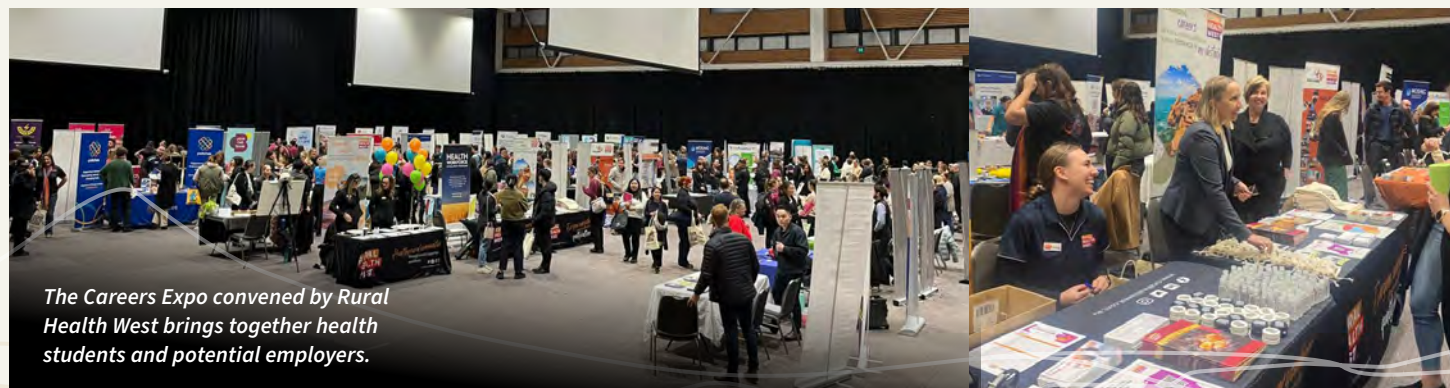
Additionally, Rural Health West worked closely with student rural health clubs to implement the WA Growth Program, designed to highlight health careers to students in rural locations.

Beyond our efforts to introduce health students to rural career pathways, Rural Health West also collaborates closely with early-career health professionals, helping them transition into new roles across rural WA.

In 2023-2024, we supported 22 recent graduates in securing their first positions in rural WA and awarded 35 relocation grants to later-stage health professionals, helping them transition to living and working in country communities.

We also provided financial assistance to five physiotherapy students, enabling them to complete year-long placements in rural WA. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting the opportunity to manage a diverse caseload, the extensive learning and development experiences, and the chance to explore the professional and lifestyle benefits offered by different regions.

Many recent graduates require professional clinical supervision to broaden their scope of practice. This supervision often comes with costs that may be shouldered by either the practitioner or their dedicated mentor, who may need to reduce their own practice to provide this guidance. Through our mentorship grants, we successfully helped 11 allied health professionals secure clinical mentors in rural areas, thereby enhancing the range and diversity of healthcare services in underserved rural communities.



The Careers Expo convened by Rural Health West brings together health students and potential employers.

Just wanted to acknowledge that Tallulah did a superb job on arranging the Brookton week. Nothing was too much trouble for her along the way. It ran so well, largely because of her excellent planning.

Tallulah was also great company during the week, and really connected well with staff and students. We were very fortunate to have her with us, it was a great help. I sincerely appreciated Rural Health West allowing this to occur, and for providing her assistance.

Keith McNaught
Curtin University

Case studies:

WA Growth Program

The WA Growth Program, spearheaded by Rural Health West, has made significant strides in promoting health careers to students in rural locations. Collaborating with student rural health clubs—WAALHIIBE, CROHC, and SPINRPHEX—the program set out to inspire the next generation by demonstrating the diverse opportunities within the health sector.

Each club received funding from Rural Health West to visit high schools in country towns, engaging students in hands-on activities and discussions about health careers. The initiative, rooted in the belief that “You can’t be what you don’t see,” was designed to connect health students with high schoolers, offering a tangible glimpse into the world of healthcare. The plan is to maintain these relationships over three years, allowing students to build on their knowledge and interest as they progress through their high school journey.

The visits to schools such as Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School, Grace Christian School and Busselton School have been met with enthusiasm.

According to Kathy Chiera, Head of Secondary at Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School, the engagement

was high, with students eager to participate in the interactive stations.

The positive feedback was echoed by Grace Christian School, where the Year 7 students found the sessions to be both enjoyable and enlightening. One student remarked, “It was very fun when we did the reflexes the best,” while another highlighted how the experience made them more aware of the different perspectives in health professions.

The clubs involved in the program were equally positive about the experience, noting that the project’s success was largely due to the dedication of the participating students.

The WA Growth Program is not just a testament to the importance of hands-on learning, but also a clear indicator of how targeted initiatives can ignite a passion for healthcare careers among rural students.



Chelsi Mier

From July to October 2023, Chelsi, a social work student from Edith Cowan University, completed a 500-hour placement in Port Hedland and South Hedland at the Youth Involvement Council (YIC), a not-for-profit organisation that primarily serves at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Reflecting on her experience, Chelsi noted, “Completing my placement in the Pilbara exposed me to unique learnings and diverse experiences that have helped shape my professional and personal identity. The most profound moment during my placement was learning about the rich connection to traditional culture that Aboriginal people practice in the region and the generosity people had in sharing this with me.”

During her placement, Chelsi developed critical skills in working in a culturally safe and competent manner. She emphasised the importance of building connections and engaging in meaningful consultation, stating, “Gaining insight into the challenges of living in the Pilbara has provided me with context and perspective, allowing me to critically analyse and understand situations in a more nuanced way.”



Rhian Wilkie

The rural placement allowed Chelsi to immerse herself in a new community and collaborate with local agencies, pushing her out of her comfort zone. She shared, “I’ve learned a lot about myself and the trajectory I wish to take in my social work career while also strengthening my resilience, self-confidence, autonomy, and adaptability.”

Chelsi also highlighted the strong connections she built with fellow social work students on placement in Hedland, which accelerated her learning. “The relationships I’ve formed with the other students will continue beyond the placement, helping to create a strong professional network,” she added.



Chelsi and friends cooling off in the Pilbara.

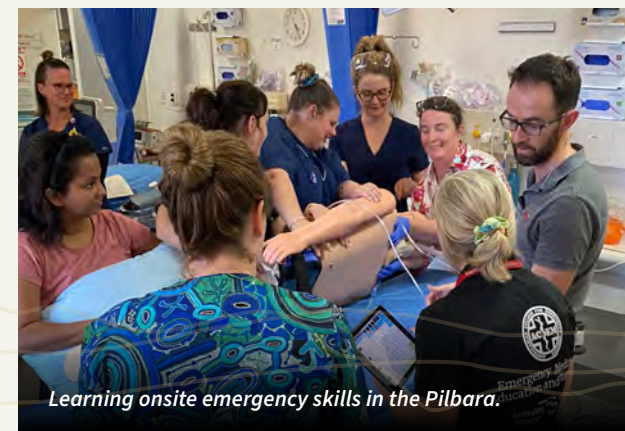
Rhian, a nursing student from Curtin University, completed a five-week emergency department placement at Albany Health Campus during her final semester as a student registered nurse. Reflecting on the experience, Rhian described it as “eye-opening and invaluable,” significantly enriching her understanding of healthcare in underserved communities.

One of the standout aspects of the placement was the close-knit nature of the rural community and the strong connections between healthcare providers and patients. “Unlike the bustling environment of larger hospitals, the rural setting fostered a more personal approach to patient care,” Rhian shared. This allowed her to develop trusting relationships with patients and their families, enhancing both their care and her appreciation for the human aspect of nursing.

The resource limitations of the rural hospital also required adaptability and innovation. Rhian noted that the experience helped develop her critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as she often had to find alternative methods to deliver care with limited resources.

Working in a smaller facility also emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. “I had the chance to work closely with a variety of healthcare professionals, which provided a more comprehensive understanding of patient care,” Rhian explained. This collaborative environment reinforced the importance of teamwork in delivering quality healthcare.

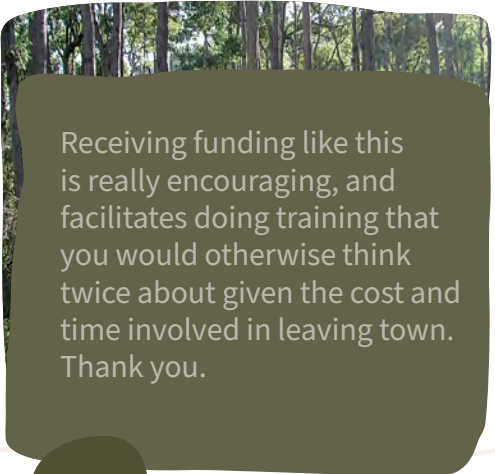
Rhian’s placement at Albany Health Campus was a formative experience that taught her about the profound impact of community, adaptability, and collaboration in nursing. She is grateful for the lessons learned and looks forward to continuing her career in rural and regional healthcare.



Learning onsite emergency skills in the Pilbara.



Rhian at the Granite Skywalk.



Receiving funding like this is really encouraging, and facilitates doing training that you would otherwise think twice about given the cost and time involved in leaving town. Thank you.

Advanced Skills Support Program
participant

Broadening skills

and expanding horizons

Throughout the year, Rural Health West remained dedicated to enhancing the skills and broadening the scope of practice for rural health professionals. Our comprehensive education and development program, informed by diverse insights, achieved notable success.

In the 2023-2024 program, we facilitated 21 workshops, two conferences, two multi-day education weekends, and three forums, with over 800 rural health professionals, students, and stakeholders participating in our offerings.

Our commitment to quality was reflected in the feedback, with 100 per cent of workshop attendees indicating that their learning expectations were met, thanks to the outstanding presenters, content, and materials.

The Aboriginal Health Conference “Dedication: The Story of our Elders,” held on 18-19 November 2023 in Walyalup (Fremantle), featured keynote addresses by Bardi woman and researcher Professor Pat Dudgeon AM, and Tommy Duggan, founder of Hoops 4 Health Australia. Taking place just weeks after the referendum on the Voice to Parliament, the conference offered a space for health professionals dedicated to Aboriginal health to connect, debrief, and begin processing the implications of the outcome.

On 16-17 March 2024, we hosted the WA Rural Health Conference “Elevating Care in the Outback,” which included keynote speeches from the National Rural Health Commissioner Adjunct Professor Ruth Stewart, high-performance coach Peta Slocombe, and cancer survivor and motivational speaker Michael Crossland.

In May 2024, we organised the popular Rural and Remote Retrieval Weekend in Karijini, where 22 participants engaged in simulated scenarios within the stunning gorges, honing their skills in managing medical emergencies.

Aboriginal Health Conference 2023 attendance

GP: 73 delegates

Aboriginal health worker / Aboriginal health practitioner: 16 delegates

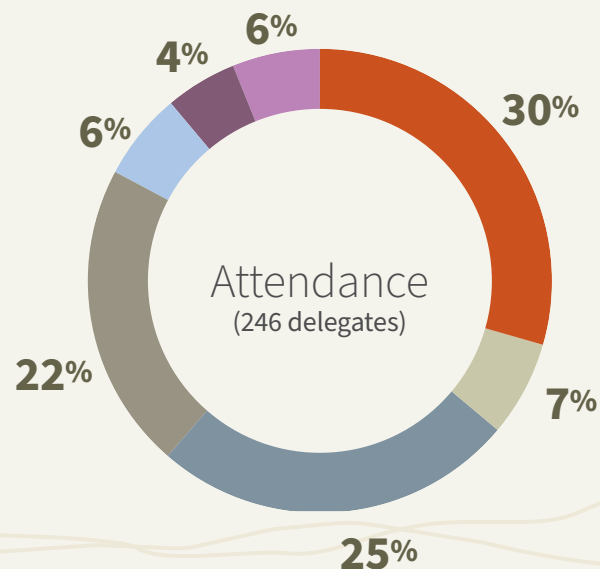
Allied health / nurses / midwives: 62 delegates

Other: 53 delegates

Day registration (Saturday): 15 delegates

Student: 12 delegates

Registrar: 15 delegates





4 and 5 May 2024. Rural Outdoor Adventure Race (ROAR).

I would like to personally and formally acknowledge your incredible organisational efforts that made the Rural and Remote Mental Health Conference the success that it was.

I loved the energy in the room that was generated by the participants, and this would not have been so had all of the elements of a successful conference not been present. It was your personal efforts and the collective team efforts that made it such a success.

Paula Chatfield

Executive Director, Mental Health
and Aboriginal Health Strategy
WA Country Health Service

Our Rural Outdoor Adventure Race (ROAR) provided a similar learning opportunity for students and junior doctors. Hosted in Boorla Bardip (Kings Park), 24 participants acquired new skills under the guidance of senior emergency practitioners.

Additionally, Rural Health West hosted specialised upskilling forums in anaesthetics, paediatrics, and obstetrics and gynaecology for GP proceduralists and rural generalists.

Supporting the development of rural health professionals remained a top priority, with the Australian Government's Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP) offering significant assistance. In 2023-2024, we invested \$1,497,167 in supporting 537 rural health professionals to expand their skill sets and practice capabilities.

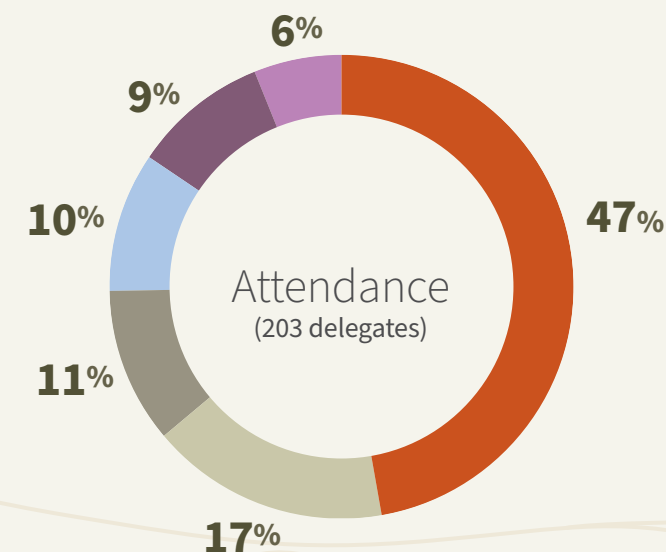
Health professionals in priority areas like the Pilbara and Kimberley accounted for 45 per cent of all HWSP funding, aligning with our mission to expand healthcare services in these vulnerable communities.

Furthermore, we supported 35 doctors in transitioning to, or continuing to provide safe, independent procedural practices through the Advanced Skills Support Program. Delivered in partnership with WA Country Health Service, this program provides GP proceduralists and rural generalists with access to mentoring, observerships, and upskilling opportunities, helping them transition to independent practice, enhance their confidence in complex procedures, and maintain their skills.



WA Rural Health Conference 2024 attendance

- GP / medical practitioner: 96 delegates
- Nurses / midwives / allied health / Aboriginal health worker: 34 delegates
- Other: 22 delegates
- Day registration: 20 delegates
- Student: 19 delegates
- Registrar / junior doctor / intern / RMO: 12 delegates



This program plays a vital role in attracting and retaining healthcare professionals in rural areas, where the opportunity to practise procedural medicine is a significant drawcard.

Recognising our expertise in delivering educational programs, WA Country Health Service engaged us to organise the 2023 WA Rural and Remote Mental Health Conference. This conference, held for the first time since 2019, was highly successful, with 237 delegates attending four days of activities, including 120 educational and social sessions.

Rural Health West was also re-engaged by WA Primary Health Alliance to continue delivering the Peel GP Incentive Fund Initiative – Education and Training Support Project for an additional 12 months. This project provides ongoing education and training for GPs in the Peel region, allowing them to maintain professional competence, update their knowledge, and acquire new skills. Throughout the year, 25 Peel GPs participated in various aspects of the initiative.

In addition to educating health professionals, Rural Health West also provides support to partners and families of rural clinicians. Throughout the year, we provided 35 partners of health professionals with a partner education grant to assist them pursue professional development to improve their local employment opportunities and prospects.

We also provided financial support to 23 families to assist with the cost of travelling alongside their partner when attending professional development outside of their region.

Impact on the ground:

Ayo Bovell



For Ayo Bovell and her husband, Dr Christopher Bovell, the decision to move to the town of Morawa in the heart of WA's Midwest was lifechanging.

Dr Bovell, the town's sole general practitioner, and Ayo, who serves as the practice manager, have fully embraced rural living but acknowledge the challenges that come with operating a small business in a rural location.

For that reason, Ayo recently completed a Diploma in Project Management, with financial support from Rural Health West.

"Over the past eight months, I have been working on getting my Diploma and it has been an enriching experience."

"I would not have been able to undertake this without the support provided by Rural Health West."

Ayo and her husband are dedicated to continuing their journey of running the practice and building their lives in the Morawa community.

"The rural life in Morawa is a dream come true. The community greeted us with open arms and a warmth and kindness you'd only find in a small town like this."

Dr Heidi Tudehope

GP obstetrician Heidi Tudehope has travelled far and wide but in the end all roads led her to exactly where she was meant to be – in WA's beautiful Margaret River region.

Having worked as a nurse prior to her medical training, Heidi found it difficult to choose her specialty from emergency, obstetrics, and general practice.

"Then I realised that if I went rural, I could do all three! I did a rural placement in my final year and I'm so glad I did."

Now, no two days are ever the same for the 2018 WA Country Health Service Intern of the Year Award winner.

"You treat absolutely everything; it's a huge part of being an emergency doctor down here," she said.

"Margaret River Hospital's maternity unit is small, but we have capacity to deliver low-risk patients."

"Things don't always go to plan though, so I am so grateful to have a strong women's health background and to have neonates and paediatrics experience."



Last year Heidi took part in the GP Obstetrics Mentoring Program, which helped her transition to independent, safe practice as a newly-qualified GP obstetrician.

"As a newcomer to town, it takes a while to develop your resources, understand your location and learn how everything works before you can really start contributing as a clinician," she said.

"WACHS has a series of credentialing requirements to ensure patient safety, so there were quite a few courses and qualifications I needed to complete to start practising as a procedural GP."

"That involves both time and cost, so the financial support from the mentoring program has helped me find my footing while getting started."

Hannah Boyle

Physiotherapist Hannah Boyle currently finds herself at the heart of the Pilbara, making a significant impact on the lives of disadvantaged communities.

“I’ve been working rurally for the past two and a half years, and initially, I believed it was the best way to continue learning after finishing my degree. Working here has been the best thing for my professional development,” Hannah said.

“I’ve gained exposure to a wide range of patient cases, which has sharpened my clinical skills and helped me find specific areas of practice that I love. I’ve been involved in various exciting programs and have had the privilege of working alongside inspiring and passionate healthcare professionals.”

However, she has also faced unique challenges in providing healthcare with limited resources. These challenges have driven her to seek continuous improvement and support from her mentors and colleagues.

Through Rural Health West, Hannah has found support from the Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP), a critical part of her professional growth.

“The HWSP has given me access to mentoring with paediatric physiotherapy experts in Perth, helping me build a strong support network in my area of interest. Rural Health West has been instrumental in my journey, supporting me in attending conferences, training courses, and professional development opportunities.

These experiences have significantly boosted my confidence and skill set, ultimately enhancing the quality of care I provide to my clients in the Pilbara.”

Among the beneficiaries of Hannah’s care are twin sisters living with Cerebral Palsy.

“I am currently working with twin 1.5-year-old girls who have a Cerebral Palsy diagnosis. Our team has received support to attend further training, which developed our skills to provide therapy and prescribe equipment for the girls. This has improved access to high-quality therapy options for other children in the Pilbara with similar needs.

“We have also been working with a specialist team in Perth, which has been a tremendous learning experience. The local multidisciplinary team collaborates to ensure the family receives the support they need in their daily life,” Hannah said.



Hannah Boyle with one of the twins she supports.

2024 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN RURAL HEALTH LONG SERVICE AWARDS

2024 WA Rural Health Long Service Awards

The WA Rural Health Long Service Awards, hosted by Rural Health West and WA Country Health Service on 23 February 2024, acknowledged the dedication and commitment of medical practitioners who have practised in rural communities for more than 20 years.

This year, we recognised six doctors for 40 years of service, 19 for doctors for 30 years of service and 23 doctors for 20 years of service.



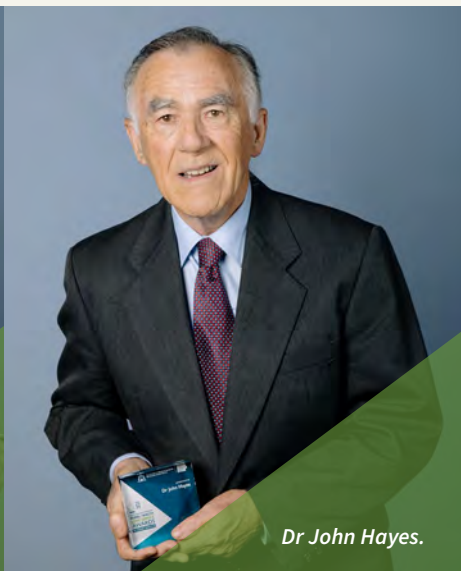
*Clinical Professor
Harvey Coates.*



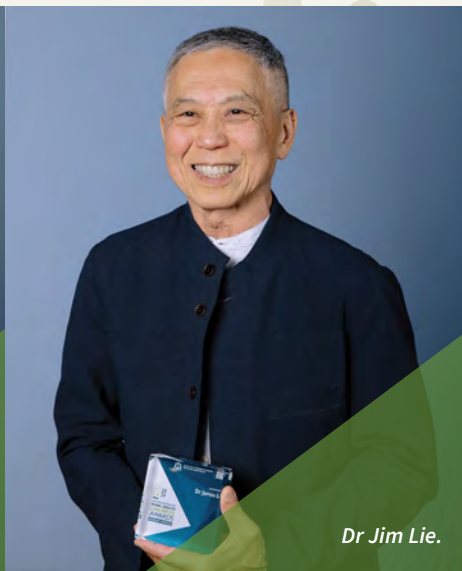
*23 February 2024 WA Rural Health Long
Service Awards, Fraser's Kings Park, Perth.*



Dr Tom Cottee.



Dr John Hayes.



Dr Jim Lie.



Dr Mark Zafir.



*40 year Long Service Award recipients.
Absent: Dr Robert Langlands.*



Attendees celebrating the awards.



2024 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN RURAL HEALTH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

2024 WA Rural Health Excellence Awards

The WA Rural Health Excellence Awards, hosted by Rural Health West and WA Country Health Service on 16 March 2024, celebrated health professionals who have enhanced or extended the quality of care available in rural locations.

Finalists and winners were recognised across nine categories, acknowledging the contributions of individuals and teams who strived to improve healthcare for rural communities.



16 March 2024 WA Rural Health Excellence Awards,
Pan Pacific Hotel, Perth.



Lesley Nelson
*Aboriginal Health Professional of the
Year and Chairmans' Award recipient.*



Dr Stephanie Trust and Dr John
Rosser Davies
GP of the Year (joint winners).



Rural Health West Chair Honourable Terry 'Tuck' Waldron and the Honourable Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA, WA Minister for Health.



*WA Country Health Service
- TeleChemotherapy
Health team of the year.*



Award night celebrations.



*Dr Robyn Doney
Allied Health Professional of the Year.*



*Paul Ingram
Clinical Leader of the Year.*



*Anne Evans
Community Health
Professional of the Year.*



*Michele Harvey
Nurse or Midwife of the Year.*



*Dr Sara Armitage
Specialist (non-GP) of the Year.*



*Tia Brand-Williams
Young Professional of the Year.*







Thank you to you and your team so very much for all your hard work to make the day such a success. It was a perfect day, the venue was a fabulous choice for including family and even pets. It was wonderful to be able to connect with friends and colleagues old and new. I have forwarded this email to other colleagues to encourage them to join the network also. Once again thank you.

Great Southern Health
Professionals Network event attendee

I think it's a great initiative and has a positive effect especially for new staff and staff in smaller towns. It's an under-rated gem, and as our workforce grows it is getting even more important to have an interagency network such as this. Thank you!

Health Professionals

Network member satisfaction
survey response

Forging connections

through the Health Professionals Networks

The Regional Health Professionals Networks (HPNs) are collaborative networks that span WA, uniting healthcare professionals dedicated to serving rural communities. Facilitated by a consortium of aligned organisations, including Rural Health West, The Rural Clinical School of WA, WA Primary Health Alliance, WA Country Health Service, and local healthcare stakeholders, HPNs are instrumental in nurturing a thriving rural healthcare ecosystem.

The value of the networks has been recognised not only by health professionals, but also sector organisations. We were pleased this year to welcome new partners from the University Departments of Rural Health based in the Kimberley, Goldfields and South West regions.

The HPNs aim to provide health professionals with enhanced support, networking opportunities, continuous upskilling, knowledge sharing, and the chance to foster collaborations within their local communities.

The HPNs have flourished this year, growing by nearly 1,000 members to an incredible 4,068 members. Attendance at HPN events has surged, underlining the growing demand for these gatherings.

Over the past year, the HPNs collectively hosted an impressive total of 73 education activities and networking events, drawing participation from 1,563 health professionals.

These events covered an extensive array of topics, including pain management, wound care, suturing and plastering techniques, ostomy and stoma health, orthopaedic care, mental health, diabetes management, and substance addiction.

We have also included more family-friendly events based on feedback from members, which has led to increased participation and attendance.

Membership surveys indicate that 85 per cent of members have experienced greater collegiate support due to their involvement in the networks, with 94 per cent of members indicating they would recommend the network to another rural health professional. Almost two thirds of members also reported that their involvement with the networks has enabled them to better navigate referral pathways and options, improving patient outcomes.



TOTALS MEMBERS

441

391

648

416

728

1,183

261



4,068

2023-2024 EVENTS

16

13

10

7

12

10

5



73

2023-2024 EVENT ATTENDEES

452

353

405

133

411

413

96



2,263

A group of people are gathered around a large, bright campfire at night. The fire is built on a pile of rocks and is the primary light source, casting a warm glow on the scene. Several people are standing and talking, while others are sitting in folding chairs. The background is dark, with some trees visible under a deep blue night sky. The overall atmosphere is relaxed and communal.

Participants debrief by the fire.

I just wanted to touch base and say how lovely it was to meet you and the team and to thank you for including me in the event. I made some great contacts and found it very beneficial in terms of networking.

Kimberley Health Professionals Network
event attendee

Case study:

Cultural immersion

brings weekend of learning and connection

The inaugural Bush Medicine Cultural Immersion weekend, organised by the Kimberley Health Professionals Network (KHPN), has given participants a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and connection to Country.

Held at Neem Campground on the Dampier Peninsula, the immersion provided a unique and enriching experience that blended practical knowledge of bush medicine with personal stories from Aboriginal Elder, Mena.

Travelling in convoy, the 21 participants made their way to the campground, setting up camp before embarking on a guided on-Country walk.

“Mena guided the group through significant cultural sites, including a Stolen Generation kids bush camp, a shell midden, and a well that local Aboriginal people were forced to dig,” said KHPN Coordinator Sara Hennessy.

“Along the way, she introduced various plants used in bush medicine.”

The afternoon concluded with a swim at the mouth of the lagoon, followed by a barbecue dinner where Mena shared her story as a child of the Stolen Generation.

Mena’s story provided a moving and deeply personal element to the weekend and helped participants develop a deeper understanding of the lasting effects of this policy; many of whom had not previously heard a first-hand account from a child of the Stolen Generation.

“I have lived in the Kimberley for more than 10 years and have walked on Country with Traditional Owners from around the region, but with Mena’s guidance I felt like I was seeing the bush for the first time,” said Jenni Lowe, Coordinator for the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Wellbeing Informed Care program.

“The array of useful/medicinal plants all around us blew my mind. Listening to Mena’s knowledge, passion, and deep respect for the healing power of Country was truly moving.

“As a health professional, I felt privileged to learn a bit about the ways Aboriginal people have been doing things for so many generations,” Jenni said.

“The immersive aspects of the weekend gave the group a really rich experience which has given them insight into traditional bush medicine and connection to Country. We’ll definitely look to hold more on-Country events,” HPN Coordinator Sara said.



I would just like to say how appreciative we are of the work you did to get Larry through the Medicare jungle so he can work in the Kutjungka clinics for KAMS. He arrived yesterday and is getting his induction as I write. Your attention to detail and professional approach was above and beyond and for that I am thankful.

Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services
(Locum arranged by Rural Health West)

Delivering on our

commitment to accessible care

WA's vast expanse of 2.5 million square kilometres poses a significant challenge for those living outside major cities when it comes to accessing specialist healthcare. Rural Health West takes on this challenge by delivering a range of outreach programs on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, ensuring that rural and remote communities can access care from visiting medical specialists and multidisciplinary teams.

In the 2023-2024 period, Rural Health West held jurisdiction over five outreach programs. Rural Health West also worked closely with partners, the Aboriginal Health Council of WA and Lions Outback Vision to deliver two coordination programs:

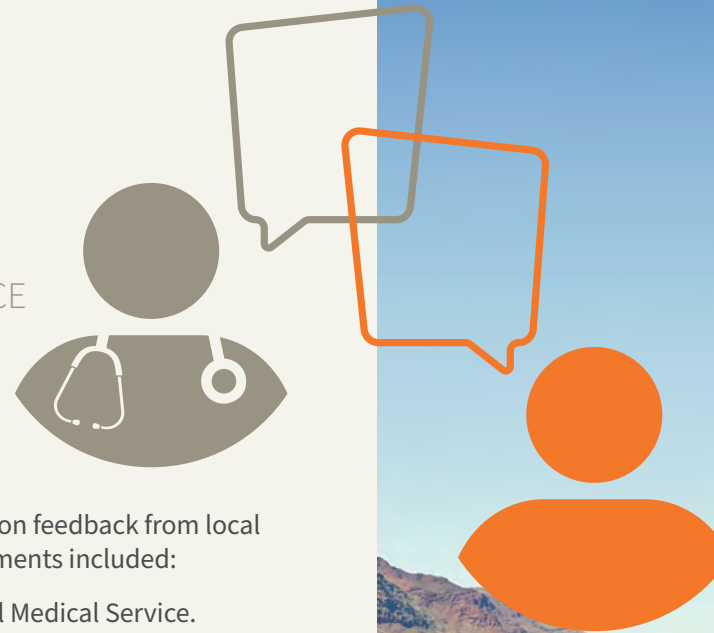
- Eye and Ear Surgical Support.
- Healthy Ears – Better Hearing, Better Listening.
- Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program.
- Rural Health Outreach Fund.
- Visiting Optometrists Scheme.
- Ear Health Coordination Program.
- Coordination of Indigenous Eye Health.

Together, these outreach programs enabled the delivery of an impressive 79,579 occasions of service across 140 rural and remote locations in 2023/2024. The majority of these services, around 73 per cent, were offered in the remote Goldfields, Kimberley, and Pilbara regions, substantially reducing the travel burden on patients in these areas. Notably, 55 per cent of appointments were conducted with Aboriginal people.

Effective connections and communications between Rural Health West, outreach providers, local health services, and rural health professionals are essential for ensuring the accessibility of visiting services in rural communities. Regional Working Groups convene biannually to determine the optimal mix, frequency, and distribution of these services in each region.

79,579

OCCASIONS OF SERVICE
ACROSS 140 RURAL
COMMUNITIES



Improvements and additions to service delivery are regularly incorporated based on feedback from local stakeholders and service providers. In 2023-2024, service expansion and improvements included:

- New rheumatology and dermatology service delivered by South West Aboriginal Medical Service.
- Five children from the East Pilbara were able to access fast tracked ear surgery in South Hedland through collaborative efforts by Ear Science Institute of Australia and Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service.
- Supported Area of Need application for ophthalmology to the Goldfields.
- Supported an Aboriginal health worker to complement podiatry services to Halls Creek, increasing cultural security of the service.
- Supported the orientation and onboarding of a new female GP through 'shadowing' visits to take over delivering services to Newman and the Western Desert communities following the retirement of the longstanding female GP.
- Secured new visiting female GP service to the Great Southern following withdrawal of services by existing provider.

In addition to providing access to healthcare, visiting services play a crucial role in upskilling local health professionals. In the 2023-2024 period, visiting providers delivered a total of 139 professional development sessions to 439 health professionals.

Delivered via small group learning, one-to-one mentoring and at times, informal discussions under the shade of a tree, topics included use of retinal cameras, heart failure medication, trauma informed care, palliative nephrology, wound care management, prolapse management, supporting students with verbal delay, and more.

Other activities delivered as adjuncts to the outreach programs, included convening the fourth WA Ear and Hearing Health Forum for ear and hearing health professionals, coordinating a refresh of the WA Child Ear Health Strategy, and hosting the inaugural WA Aboriginal Eye Health Forum.

Case studies:

Enhancing eye health in Aboriginal communities

Rural Health West recently partnered with the WA Aboriginal Eye Health Advisory Group to host the inaugural WA Aboriginal Eye Health Forum, addressing the critical issue of eye health disparities among First Nations people in Australia.

First Nations individuals are three times more likely to experience blindness and vision impairment compared to non-Indigenous Australians, suffering from conditions like diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, and trachoma at significantly higher rates.

The Forum brought together participants from across various sectors to focus on innovation, collaboration, and the coordination of eye health services for remote and First Nations communities in WA.

Supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, the Forum offered delegates the opportunity to participate in hands-on workshops, learn from leading researchers, and establish connections with key stakeholders.

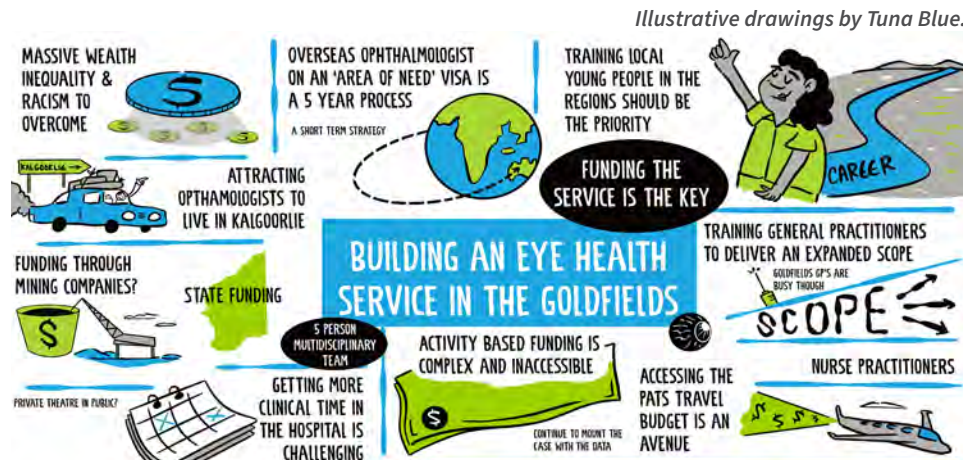
Keynote speaker, Lose Fonua, Chief Executive of the First Nations Eye Health Alliance, discussed the formation and development of the Alliance, followed by a session on cultural safety in healthcare led by Jessica Curnuck, Eye Health Coordinator at the Aboriginal Health Council of WA.

Presenter Professor Angus Turner, an ophthalmologist and director of Lions Outback Vision emphasised the preventability of up to 95 per cent of this vision impairment and blindness among Aboriginal people, underscoring the importance of early intervention and the crucial role optometrists play in connecting patients to additional services.

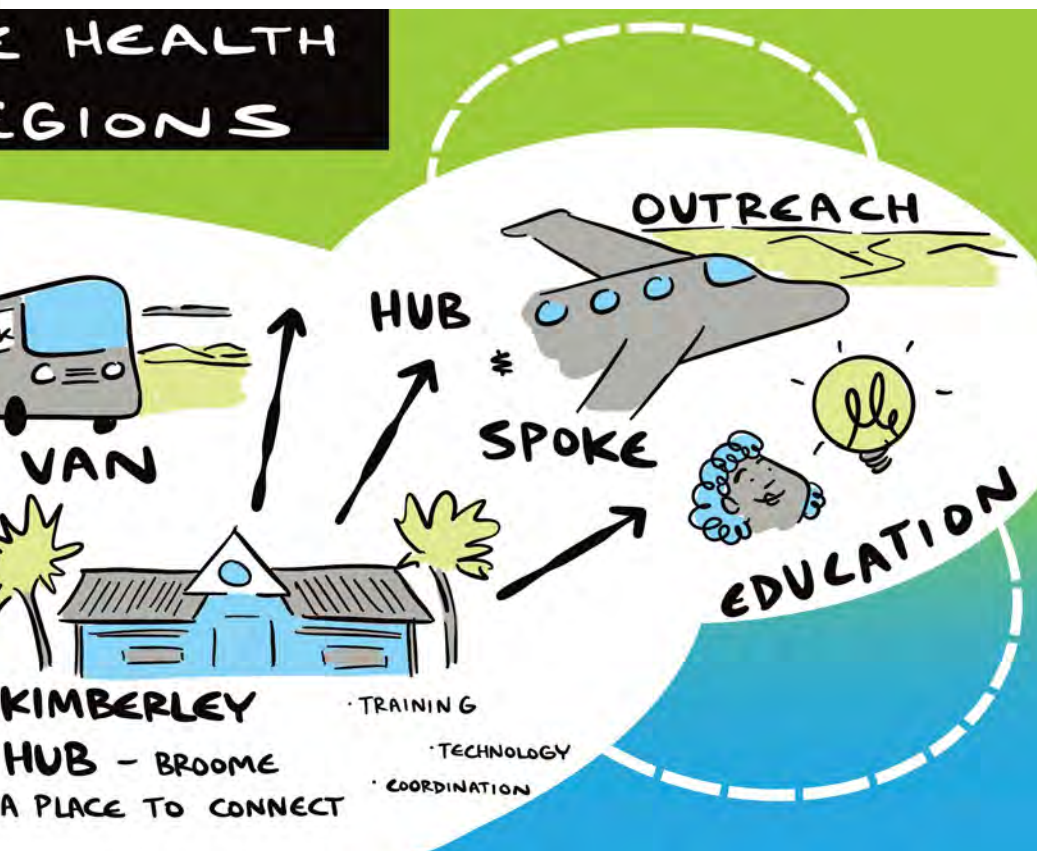
Other topics covered at the Forum included workforce development, trachoma prevention, and diabetes education.

The event aimed to strengthen the planning, coordination, and delivery of Aboriginal eye health and chronic disease management services across WA, identify effective workforce and training models, and promote holistic care approaches.





Illustrative drawings by Tuna Blue.



Professor Angus Turner shared how Lions Outback Vision is increasing access to eye health services at the Forum.



Case studies:



Outreach services making an impact

Visiting Optometrists Scheme – bringing eye care services to remote Kimberley communities

The Visiting Optometrists Scheme's outreach visits to remote Kimberley communities, including Balgo and Halls Creek, yielded a range of positive outcomes for both diabetic patients and school children.

The team from Lions Outback Vision played a crucial role in a Diabetes One-Stop-Shop clinic, screening 19 diabetic patients who had not received care for an extended period, and triaged those needing immediate attention. Additionally, 14 school children were screened, with the school health nurse receiving training to ensure continued care.

In collaboration with an Aboriginal health worker, the team successfully signed up eight people for integrated team care services, updated their consent forms, and revised their management plans. They were able to engage with individuals who had not sought care in a long time, taking a holistic approach to their health by identifying missing elements in their current management plans.

The trip also facilitated valuable connections with Halls Creek Hospital, leading to the successful setup of clinics for the following weeks and plans for additional visits with the support of the hospital. Two complex cases identified during the visit will be transferred to Perth, with all necessary preparations completed before the team left the community, ensuring smooth continuity of care.

Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Program – delivering mental health services to the outer metropolitan area

The outreach services delivered by 360 Health and Community to patients in outer-metropolitan Midland and surrounding areas had a significant impact on its clients, particularly in addressing mental health and chronic disease management.

Out of 16 clients, eight were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or attention deficit hyperactive disorder, highlighting the program's role in identifying and managing mental health conditions. The collaboration between the registered

nurse and the visiting psychiatrist was key to the clinic's success, ensuring smooth operations and continued patient engagement. Regular follow-ups were essential, with approximately half of the clients returning for reviews, which is crucial for maintaining their well-being.

The program also provided much-needed access to specialist care through the Street Doctor clinics, addressing the barriers faced by clients who might otherwise be unable to afford or access such services.

Additionally, the presence of a diabetes educator and pharmacist facilitated essential health interventions, such as continuous glucose monitoring and medication reconciliation, enhancing the quality of care provided.

Healthy Ears, Better Hearing, Better Listening – bringing audiology services to the East Pilbara

The outreach audiology service, delivered in the East Pilbara by Ear Science Institute Australia, is not only improving health outcomes, but also employment opportunities.

OUTREACH SERVICES PER REGION

REGION	VISITS	TOTAL OCCASIONS OF SERVICE	OCCASIONS OF SERVICE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
Goldfields	739	21,829	12,835
Great Southern	299	7,179	625
Kimberley	1,065	24,024	15,872
Midwest	450	4,507	1,845
Pilbara	604	12,369	7,883
South West	91	734	360
Wheatbelt	439	5,521	1,219
Metro	319	3,416	3,294
TOTAL	4,006	79,579	43,933

Supporting young Martu people in the East Pilbara, their Healthy Hearing Outback team has set up a work experience initiative with the intention of inspiring a community ear health champion or possible career path in healthcare.

So far, three children from Jigalong Remote Community School have participated in the work experience program. One participant has expressed an interest in becoming a nurse and this experience gave her a taste of clinical life.

The team is now exploring the possibility of having students travel to Perth with their teacher to visit Perth and experience more in the world of ear and hearing care.

Rural Health Outreach Fund – bringing paediatric care to the northern Goldfields

Paediatric visits to the northern Goldfields by Dr Christine Jeffries-Stokes have a meaningful impact on both the healthcare team and the community.

Christine is accompanied by paediatric registrars and junior doctors. Beyond the clinical work, their visits included significant cultural exchanges, which enhance the team's understanding of the local context and strengthened their connection with the community.

The team engaged with the children in the classroom, participating in activities that fostered trust and rapport. This interaction also provided an opportunity for the healthcare providers to discuss individual cases with the school principal and the community health nurse from Laverton, who accompanied them. The nurse was able to administer flu vaccines to community members, supported by the presence of the visiting team.

In the evening, the team joined the Mt Margaret community for a barbecue, where they received cultural education, visited a culturally significant site and shared stories with the local Aboriginal community.

OUTREACH SERVICES
TOTAL VALUE

\$12,663,973



Credit: Richard Riley.

Rural health advocacy

bridging gaps in healthcare access

In response to increasing disparities and inequities in healthcare across WA, Rural Health West is increasingly focused on its strategy to encourage policy review or formation to enhance conditions and programs that support health professionals and/or address factors which act as disincentives for health professionals to live and work in rural communities.

Rural Health West has a track record of working to improve rural health through supporting the rural health workforce. As an independent, non-government organisation with strong relationships throughout the health sector, Rural Health West is well positioned to advocate for localised and systemic change to improve access to healthcare for people living in rural communities.

We engage with stakeholders through various means, including participation in sector and advisory groups, our annual survey cycle, hosting and attending events and day to day liaison with health professionals and organisations, which helps us to have a deep understanding of the challenges currently facing the sector.

Our advocacy efforts over the past 12 months have included:

- **WA Rural GP Summit:** Developed and hosted the WA Rural GP Summit bringing together rural GPs and stakeholders to identify the most meaningful interventions required to bolster the rural GP workforce in WA.
- **Liaison with the WA Minister for Health:** Rural Health West representatives met with the WA Minister for Health, the Honourable Amber-Jade Sanderson to discuss potential opportunities for the State Government to better support rural health professionals working outside of the hospital sector.
- **Investigated Local Government Support:** Forged a partnership with WALGA to investigate the financial burden on local government authorities in funding rural and remote health services, and develop solutions to this entrenched issue.

- **Informed Parliament Members on GP Workforce:** Wrote to all members of parliament across rural WA, offering critical insights into the current GP workforce status in their respective electorates, fostering informed decision-making.
- **Engaged in Primary Care Roundtable Discussions:** Following the WA Health Summit, convened by the WA Minister for Health, Rural Health West participated in roundtable discussions regarding potential improvements to primary healthcare throughout WA.
- **Signalled support for the Voice to Parliament:** Rural Health West's Board and staff promoted their collective support for the establishment of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament in Australia.
- Produced the ***Rural General Practice in Western Australia – Annual Workforce Update 2023***, providing an extensive historical perspective on the GP workforce's evolution since 2002.

- **Published Annual Health Workforce Update 2023:** Released the new report, which delves into the trends and insights of the nursing, midwifery, dental, and allied health workforce in rural WA, shedding light on crucial workforce dynamics.
- **Profiled Rural Resident Specialist Workforce:** Presented the *Profile of the Rural Resident Specialist Workforce 2023*, offering a comprehensive overview of resident and visiting medical specialists based in rural WA, enhancing our understanding of specialist healthcare resources in the region.
- **Highlighted workforce challenges through media:** Actively participated in numerous media interviews and wrote letters to editors, raising awareness about the complex challenges in recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals in rural areas, spotlighting the need for strategic solutions.



Case studies:

Charting a path for country general practice:

WA Rural GP Summit



Dr Ajit Chaurasia.

In March 2024, Rural Health West hosted the inaugural WA Rural GP Summit, bringing together more than 80 stakeholders, including the National Rural Health Commissioner, the WA Minister for Health, and other key figures from across Australia. The Summit was convened to address the growing concerns about the declining attractiveness of rural general practice as a career and the projected need for an additional 300 GPs in rural WA by 2030.

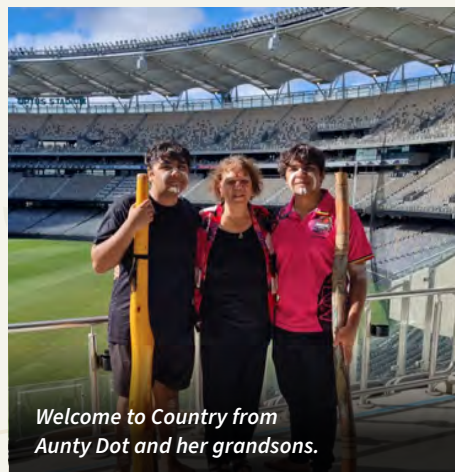
Through extensive prior stakeholder engagement, including targeted conversations, surveys, and literature reviews, Rural Health West identified 10 key interventions designed to strengthen the rural GP workforce. These initiatives were selected for their potential high impact and feasibility, allowing progress without requiring significant policy reforms or new funding. The Summit's focus on actionable, short-term solutions highlighted the importance of leveraging existing resources and collaboration among stakeholders.

Frontline perspectives from rural GPs, including IMGs, emphasised the need for cultural and professional support, while discussions with medical students and junior doctors underscored the importance of early exposure to rural practice. System-level input from key stakeholders stressed the need for flexible career pathways and targeted support programs.

The Summit culminated in the development of actionable plans for each initiative, with in-principle support from stakeholders to drive implementation. The outcomes of the Summit will be encapsulated in a forthcoming White Paper by Rural Health West, providing a clear roadmap for stakeholders to advocate for necessary policy changes and improvements in rural healthcare access and outcomes across WA.



WA RURAL GP SUMMIT



*Welcome to Country from
Aunty Dot and her grandsons.*



Workshopping initiatives.



*The Honourable Amber-Jade Sanderson
MLA, WA Minister for Health.*

15 March 2024
WA Rural GP Summit, Optus Stadium.

Financials



STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	2024 \$	2023 \$
Revenue	22,796,459	22,423,163
Finance income	228,159	149,742
Other income	1,941,700	1,566,797
Profit on disposal of property, plant and equipment	–	318
Employee benefit expense	(6,018,550)	(5,432,801)
Depreciation, amortisation and impairment expense	(439,764)	(445,193)
Program expense	(17,368,984)	(17,234,428)
Property expense	(140,993)	(188,489)
Administration expense	(639,003)	(563,013)
Other expenses	(31,056)	(37,511)
Current year surplus	327,968	238,585
Income tax expense	–	–
Net current year surplus	327,968	238,585
<i>Other comprehensive income for the year</i>		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss		
Movement in reserves (funds used for non-contracted activities)	–	–
Total other comprehensive income for the year	–	–
Total comprehensive surplus attributable to Members of the entity	327,968	238,585

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

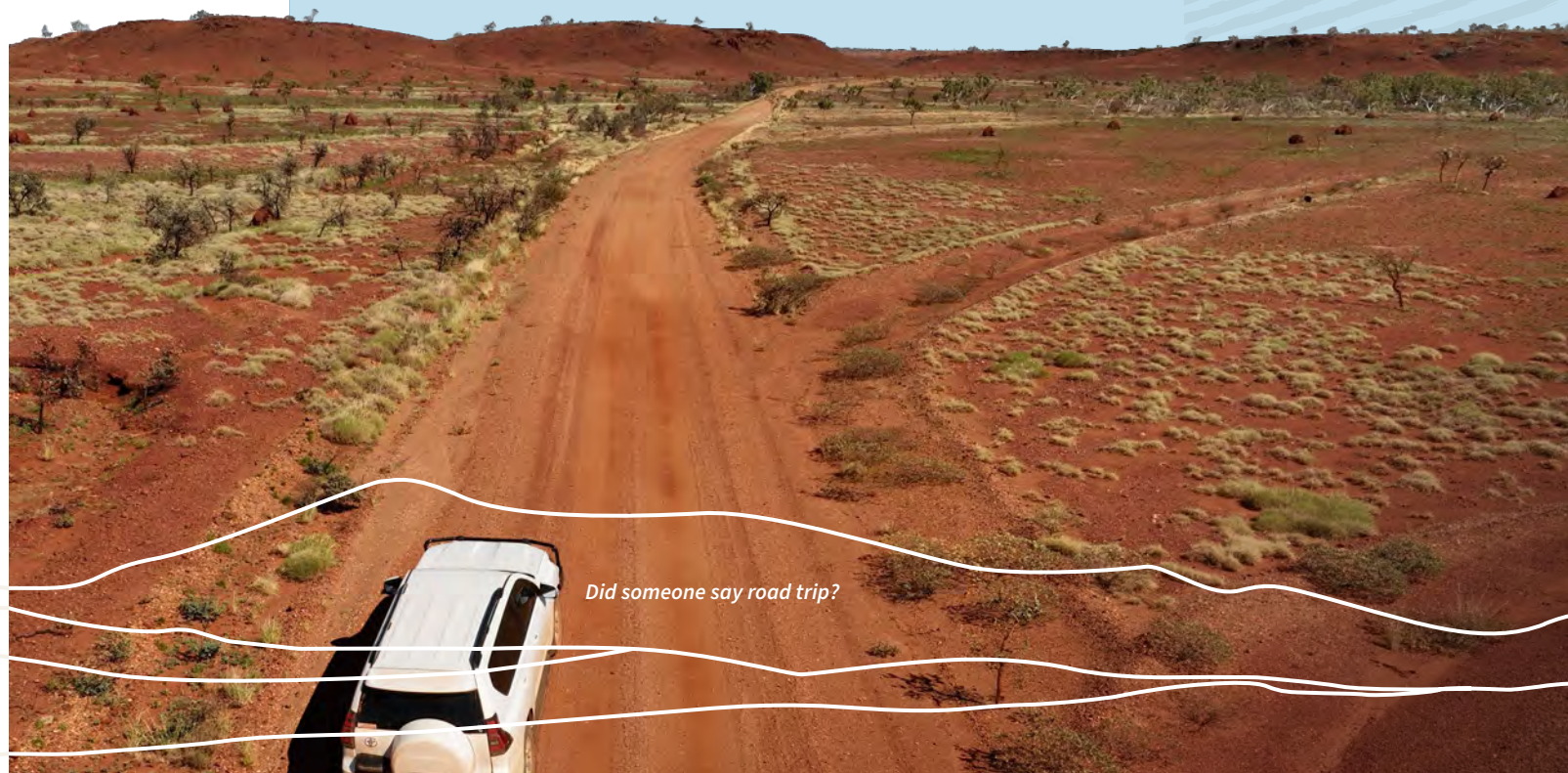
	2024 \$	2023 \$
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash on hand	11,208,845	12,004,663
Accounts receivable and other debtors	228,080	243,621
Other current assets	515,445	417,744
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	11,952,370	12,666,028
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	288,604	261,543
Right-of-use assets	532,687	291,346
Intangible assets	16,324	29,427
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	837,615	582,316
TOTAL ASSETS	12,789,985	13,248,344
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable and other payables	7,101,439	8,081,166
Lease liability	273,334	351,144
Employee provisions	884,432	884,347
Other provisions	20,000	128,376
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	8,279,205	9,445,033
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Lease liability	259,353	-
Employee provisions	66,626	40,282
Other provisions	95,304	1,500
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	421,283	41,782
TOTAL LIABILITIES	8,700,488	9,486,815
NET ASSETS	4,089,497	3,761,529
EQUITY		
Retained surplus	2,135,773	1,807,805
Reserves	1,953,724	1,953,724
TOTAL EQUITY	4,089,497	3,761,529

RURAL HEALTH WEST

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