

6 February 2025

## We're not kidding! Childcare is crucial in keeping docs in the bush.

There is an urgent need to boost childcare services in rural and remote towns for local doctors, health and other professionals, to support them to stay in those towns and help encourage more of their peers to 'go rural' too, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has said.

Releasing RDAA's Position Paper, [Childcare in Rural and Remote Australia](#), in the lead-up to the Federal Election, RDAA President Dr RT Lewandowski said:



"A lack of childcare services in rural and remote communities is discouraging more doctors and other health professionals from moving to the bush, and making it harder to keep existing rural health professionals there – particularly those with a young family or planning on having a family.

"Access to quality childcare and early learning is a critical issue for all families in rural and remote Australia...and rural doctors and other health professionals are not immune.

"Not being able to access childcare makes a big difference to the number of hours a doctor or other rural health professional can work to provide health services in their community.

"In some cases the lack of childcare in their rural town means a doctor has to leave that community for a larger centre with more childcare options, and it discourages other doctors from moving to the community.

"The availability of childcare in rural and remote towns – from early childhood right through to high school – is critical in supporting the recruitment and retention of doctors and other health professionals in the bush. That is why we have made it one of our top five priorities for the forthcoming Federal Election and our Federal pre-budget submission."

**In 2024, RDAA conducted a small survey (n=59) to assess the experiences of its rural doctor members (and some other rural and remote Australia health professionals) with childcare. Over 90 per cent of respondents were located in rural, remote and very remote areas.**

The survey revealed that access to childcare plays a significant role in decisions about where doctors and other health professionals choose to work – 66 per cent of respondents indicated that their ability to access suitable childcare has influenced where they are currently working, while a further 16 per cent said access to suitable childcare will affect future decisions about where they will practise.

“In addition to the overall lack of access to childcare, rural doctors (and other healthcare professionals and essential workers) have specific childcare needs relating to shift work and/or expanded work hours, including on-call rosters” **Dr Lewandowski said.**

“While day-based childcare may not be suitable for the after-hours or late shifts that doctors and nursing staff are required to work, boosting access to childcare during regular extended business hours goes a long way to supporting these health sector families and allowing them to call on friends and family members when needed in the evenings or weekends, while not relying on them for all of their childcare needs.

“Getting childcare right in rural and remote communities can make a big difference to the range of health services that can be provided in those communities, including even basic access to local healthcare.

“We urge the major parties to commit to drive change in this critical area if elected to Government.”

**In its Position Paper, RDAA states:**

- Access to childcare services is essential to maximise the workforce participation of key health professionals and other professionals within a community. These include doctors, nurses, other healthcare professionals and teachers.
- RDAA recognises that access to childcare services is an issue for the broader community as well as for these professionals. Innovative models that ensure critical community workforces have access to the services they need – without being detrimental to broader community access to childcare services – must be developed and implemented.
- Specific childcare initiatives to support doctors and other essential health professionals should include the establishment of childcare centres on hospital grounds in rural locations to manage priority access to childcare places, as is the case in the Australian Parliament House and some metropolitan hospitals.
- Additional investment is required in rural communities where there are waitlists for childcare services. RDAA is not seeking additional financial support for parents or carers in relation to childcare fees but is focused on innovative solutions and investment to redress the limited access to these services in rural areas.
- Initiatives to promote collaboration with other stakeholders to develop childcare capacity within the community should also be instituted.

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**Download:**

RDAA's Position Paper, [Childcare in Rural and Remote Australia](#)

RDAA's [Federal Election priorities](#)

**Photo of [Dr RT Lewandowski](#)**

**Available for interview:**

RDAA President, Dr RT Lewandowski

RDAA CEO, Ms Peta Rutherford

State specific contacts are also available

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