

20 March 2025

Targeted rural investment needed to Close the Gap in the bush

Close the Gap Day – 20 March 2025

With health targets for Closing the Gap still not on track to be met, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) says that rural-specific investment is needed if this inequity is to be improved.



“We see a number of key areas needing further, targeted investment if we are to succeed in Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in rural and remote Australia,” RDAA President Dr RT Lewandowski said.

“To start with, we need more rural doctors with an advance skill in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. The National Rural Generalist Pathway has training in this skill available as an option for all doctors who will go on to provide care as a Rural Generalist (RG) to First Nations people.

“We are calling for half of the additional GP training positions already promised by Government (and additional 200 positions from 2025 and 400 from 2028) to be allocated to RG training. This will help build the rural health workforce equipped with the skills to work in rural and remote communities and empower more rural doctors to provide high quality and culturally safe care to their Indigenous patients.”

RDAA has also called for grant funding to be available to small rural and remote hospitals and general practices to address deficiencies that are impacting on their ability to provide meet current requirements for quality patient care.

“We need to ensure that the health facilities within our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are supported to be actually capable of delivering the care that is needed and culturally safe,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“To ensure that as many Indigenous patients as possible are able to access care on the Country that is so meaningful to them, local hospital services need to be able to provide the appropriate level of birthing, dialysis and palliative care.

“Many of these facilities are currently under-staffed, under-funded and as a result, left under-servicing communities that have a high need to provide advanced and complex care.

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National
CLOSE THE GAP
Day

Agency,
Leadership,
Reform



“Funding is needed for hospitals and general practices to support improvements such as upgrades to air-conditioning, operating theatre standards, birth suite upgrades, infection control standards, and basic staff amenities.

“We are calling on the Commonwealth to provide targeted grants to help address these areas,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“Most importantly, we need a National Rural Health Strategy to coordinate the outcomes from recent reviews to be considered through a rural lens so recommendations can be progressed appropriately for the rural and remote context. The Gap in rural areas will not be improved unless our ability to deliver care generally to rural and remote patients improves.

“Increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical workforce, particularly those from rural areas, will help ensure we have a committed cohort of future generation doctors across rural and remote Australia to Close the Gap in health outcomes.

“Around 50 per cent of Indigenous patients still access care in non-Aboriginal Medical Services or Community controlled services so mainstream general practice needs to be funded and supported to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers to assist them to provide culturally safe care to this large cohort of patients.

“RDAA has developed a [five point plan for better health care for rural Australians](#), and we are working to ensure it is front and centre as we lead up to the federal election.”

Download:

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

Media contacts:

Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638

Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890