

RESOURCE 8: THE FUTURE OF THE ALLIED HEALTH RURAL GENERALIST PATHWAY

THE NEED FOR AN EXPANDED AHRGP

There is a growing push for a shift in the way healthcare in Australia is delivered. Recent challenges have highlighted the need for a sustainable and adaptive health workforce that is responsive to change. An expansion of the AHRG Pathway is an important step in responding to these challenges in rural and remote areas.

As populations age, worker numbers are falling while chronic health conditions associated with aging are increasing. There is an existing imbalance between services available in metropolitan areas compared to rural and remote areas. This growing demand will need to be met with solutions to help attract and retain health workers and use innovation to provide services. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of innovative approaches to healthcare including effective use of technology, extended scope of Allied Health clinicians and delegation of tasks to assistant practitioners.

The AHRG Pathway is well placed to meet many of these challenges in the Rural and Remote Allied Health space. As the peak body representing Allied Health Professionals working in settings across rural and remote Australia, SARRAH continues to support the expansion of the AHRG Pathway.

THE FIVE-YEAR VISION

The vision for the next five years is to make AHRG Training Positions highly sought after and respected. The following points describe ways this vision may be supported:

- The AHRG Pathway is understood and recognised nationally and across sectors, with opportunities for credentialling.
- Mechanism and infrastructure in place to support organisations implementing the AHRG Pathway.
- Organisations are supported to redesign services to enable workforce development in a billable environment.
- An education component that is relevant across all sectors (as guided by an Accreditation Council).
- Education offerings are made by multiple and/or a consortium of universities across the country.
- State health jurisdictions continue to embed the AHRG pathway and training positions within their organisational structures, and where relevant their industrial instruments.

2022 Update: Accreditation Council

Organisations involved in the development of the AHRG Pathway identified the need for a benchmark for rural generalist education and training programs. An Accreditation System for Rural Generalist Education was proposed by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association in a paper in 2018 titled *An Accreditation System for Rural Generalist Education and Training for Allied Health Professions*. The main purpose of an accreditation system is to support health services and commissioning agencies implementing the AHRG Pathway to identify education programs that address the learning and development needs of allied health professionals in rural generalist practice.

In 2022 SARRAH announced the appointment of the new Allied Health Rural Generalist Accreditation Council. Established as an independent council under the SARRAH corporate governance structure, the Council will accredit post-professional education programs in rural generalist practice for allied health professions as part of the AHRG Pathway. The council is supported by funding from the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care. It is proposed



that the council will eventually hold and maintain the education standards for the AHRG Pathway and assess applications by education providers to offer recognised AHRG courses.

2022 Update: Education

James Cook University has announced the first intake of students will commence the Master of Rural Generalist Practice in 2023. The Masters level is available to Nutrition/Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Psychology, Radiography, Social Work or Speech Pathology with at least 2 years' professional experience. The program provides an opportunity for consideration of a formal level 3 AHRG Pathway, to complement the existing pathways level 1: Rural Generalist Program and level 2: Graduate Diploma of Rural Generalist Practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway is a collaborative initiative comprising a broad variety of organisations across the Australian and New Zealand healthcare sectors. The full list of organisations is available on the SARRAH website at www.sarrah.org.au.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Resources relevant to AHRG Training Positions and the Rural Generalist Program are available through SARRAH at www.sarrah.org.au. SARRAH can provide advice to healthcare providers, commissioning agencies and other stakeholders to support scoping, development and implementation of the AHRGP.