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### **Better health outcomes for people living in rural Australia**

People living in rural and remote communities will have greater access to high quality health services with the Australian Government today announcing a \$93 million investment for rural workforce agencies.

The Federal Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie committed to the new national Rural Workforce Agency program while meeting with rural doctors and representatives from Rural Health West in Perth today.

“Over the past 20 years, Australia has had some success in boosting the number of medical and health professionals in metropolitan areas and some parts of regional Australia, however our primary focus must now ensure we address the lack of doctors and allied health professionals in regional and remote Australia,” Minister Gillespie said.

Rural Health West Chief Executive Officer, Tim Shackleton said he welcomed the focus on improving the distribution of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals throughout rural Australia.

“As one of the Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs) at the coalface of rural workforce issues, we are well aware of the ongoing challenges involved in attracting and retaining doctors and health professionals to rural and remote locations.

“Rural communities are important to the social fabric of Australia and everyone, everywhere deserves to have access to safe, sustainable and high quality health care.

“It is critical that we continue to create and strengthen effective strategies to secure health care for rural communities, and look forward to supporting the Australian Government to create a more equitable health system and improve health outcomes for people in the bush,” Mr Shackleton said.

Data collected by Rural Health West demonstrates that programs such as locum support and professional development delivered by RWAs have a strong positive retention effect.

“The greater contact and more support a rural doctor has from Rural Health West and other RWAs, the longer they opt to stay at their existing practice, which

provides continuity of care for rural patients and reduces overall costs to the Australian health system.”

Mr Shackleton said that health workforce needs can vary greatly from State to State, community to community and that improving the distribution of doctors and health professionals often requires local and bespoke models and strategies.

“There is no single, quick-fix solution to improving access and enhancing the quality of care.

“Effective solutions often involve working with other health agencies and local health providers and we are pleased the new Rural Workforce Agency program acknowledges the importance and effectiveness of this cross-agency collaboration,” Mr Shackleton said.

“We look forward to working with the Australian Government and our counterparts in other States to implement the new Rural Workforce Agency program and address the health needs of rural communities across Australia.”

The redesigned programs will commence mid-2017.

## **ENDS**

### **Media enquiries:**

Kerida Hodge, Manager Marketing and Communications      08 6389 4500

*Rural Health West aims to improve access to quality healthcare for rural communities through the provision of a highly skilled, motivated and sustainable medical and allied health workforce. We are a not-for-profit organisation primarily funded through the WA Country Health Service and the Australian Government Department of Health.*