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### **Exploring digital health prospect in country readiness project**

A ground-breaking research project to help determine the barriers for rural and remote general practice in adopting digital health is about to kick off across the State.

In partnership with WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA), Rural Health West has engaged the specialist data analysts at the Co-operative Research Centre for Spatial Information (CRC:SI) to compare the size, location and connectivity of general practices in regional areas to provide more precise support in these areas.

Digital health has been recognised world-wide as a key enabler in improving access to healthcare in regional and remote areas, however engagement to date with new technologies has been slow to take off in Australia.

For Western Australia, the benefits of using digital health can help overcome the large distances between services, but geography could be hindering development in this area.

“WA is unique, no other state in Australia has the vast distances we have and it’s a real challenge for GPs,” Acting General Manager Country WA Primary Health Network Helen McMahon says.

“We know that technologies such as telehealth can drastically improve access to services for those in regional areas, and the Country WA Digital Readiness project will help us identify any special needs for rural and regional general practice in helping to adopt these systems for their patients.”

Rural Health West shares the concern that country general practice may be inadvertently disadvantaged by their remoteness in adopting digital health and sought WAPHA’s support for the project.

“Rural Health West is pleased to be working on this initiative which will advance our understanding of the support rural GPs need to benefit from digital health technologies. Research shows that digital health services can actively improve rural, remote and Indigenous health outcomes. Our organisation is committed to strengthening rural communities through better access to quality healthcare” said Tim Shackleton, Chief Executive Officer of Rural Health West.

The CRC:SI partners with federal and state government agencies and companies to help address issues of national importance in relation to spatial informatics in the fields of health, defence, climate change and urban planning.

The Country WA Digital Readiness project has been made possible through funding provided by the Australian Government under the Primary Health Networks (PHN) Program.

**ENDS**

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*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.*