

MEDIA RELEASE

Collaborative effort to tackle Pilbara health workforce issues

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A group of peak health bodies and agencies are providing a powerful voice for the Pilbara, working together to address the longstanding challenges in improving the region's health workforce capacity.

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) and Rural Health West - through their Pilbara Health Services Collaboratives initiative - have partnered with government, service delivery and private sector representatives to establish the Pilbara Health Workforce Working Group.

The group will oversee the multi-agency collaboration and champion health workforce needs in the region. It will also focus on growing local workforce and developing skills in the community to support the existing workforce to deliver high quality health care.

Federal Member for Durack Ms Melissa Price said this collaboration is the first-of-its-kind in the region and recognises the need for a united approach, with commitment across organisations and sectors to improve health care and attract and retain a sustainable health workforce for the Pilbara.

"Many of the region's key health issues can only be tackled with a more holistic, cross-agency approach. It's great to see these agencies, private sector and all levels of government, coming together to drive long-term change and make a real difference to the local community."

WAPHA regional manager Winny Henry said the organisation's annual health needs assessments, combined with the existing recruitment challenges, has highlighted the need for a sustainable model of healthcare delivery.

"The working group has already realised that current approaches to addressing workforce demand need to be supplemented by strategies to grow local workforce and support Pilbara communities to improve their health status. If we can work in a truly collaborative way and join up all the agencies, service providers and services, even with no additional workforce, many more people could receive the health care they need.

"We're aiming for innovation, and looking beyond traditional approaches to make significant improvement to the health and wellbeing of the local community, Ms Henry said.

Rural Health West Northwest regional advisor, Chris Pickett said Rural Health West data shows the challenges of retaining health professionals in the region.

"The Pilbara experiences one of the highest turnover rates of general practitioners and is heavily reliant upon international medical graduates to provide primary medical care.

"We know that people are more likely to remain working in a location where they are well-supported and have good networks, which this cross-agency approach will promote," Mr Pickett said.

The Working Group recently established the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Workforce Sub-Committee to focus on initiatives that will provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to train for and gain meaningful employment and support in health and related sectors in the Pilbara.

The Working Group will oversee two projects recently funded by WAPHA. These are the development of a long-term strategy and partnerships to address the shortage of Aboriginal health workers, community care workers, health champions and leaders; and Grow Local, a training initiative that aims to embed important primary health skills directly into local communities.

The Pilbara Health Workforce Working Group includes representatives from the following organisations and stakeholder groups:

- WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA)
- Rural Health West
- Western Australian Country Health Service (WACHS)
- WA General Practice Education and Training
- WA Centre for Rural Health
- WA Council of Social Services
- Rural Clinical School WA
- Pilbara Aboriginal Health Planning Forum
- Wirraka Maya Aboriginal Medical Service
- Karratha Central Healthcare
- Pilbara for Purpose
- Pharmacy

Ends

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About WAHPA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes.

About Rural Health West: 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.