



College Submission
September 2022

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Health Workforce Strategy 2022-32

About the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

ACRRM's vision is *the right doctors, in the right places, with the right skills, providing rural and remote people with excellent health care*. It provides a quality Fellowship program including training, professional development, and clinical practice standards; and support and advocacy services for rural doctors and the communities they serve.

ACRRM is accredited by the Australian Medical Council to set standards for the specialty of general practice. The College's programs are specifically designed to provide Fellows with the extended skills required to deliver the highest quality Rural Generalist model of care in rural and remote communities, which often experience a shortage of face-to-face specialist and allied health services.

ACRRM has more than 5000 rural doctor members with 1000 doctors in training, who live and work in rural, remote, and indigenous communities across Australia. Our members provide expert front line medical care in a diverse range of settings including general practices, hospitals, emergency departments, Aboriginal Medical Services, and other remote settings such as RFDS and Australian Antarctic Division.

Initial Comments

The College welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Strategy which we note "will consider the workforce and strategic priorities of the ACT's tertiary hospitals, public and non-public health service providers".¹

Overall, the College supports the four strategic priorities of the strategy. We would however have liked to see the strategy more clearly identify the key workforce issues and provide clarity on the ways these would be addressed. A key omission is issues arising from the interaction of the tertiary hospital

¹ ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032 Page 9, para 3



services of the ACT with the areas of rural NSW serviced by the system. We would like to see these better incorporated into the Strategy.

General Comments

Further comments relating to each of the four strategic priorities:

Priority one: Ensuring the design of our future workforce reflect the future needs of the community

Poor access to primary care services such as being able to see a GP, and a lack of community and aged care services contribute to hospitals and emergency departments under pressure. Healthcare deficits in rural and remote areas leads to people who could not access services earlier, either due to cost, availability or access issues presenting at EDs with a range of complex needs, which EDs and hospitals end up having to treat.

The Strategy should therefore consider how it places itself within rural New South Wales in that it is a tertiary, mostly hospital-based system without any formal secondary hospitals to accommodate.

Priority two: Enabling our workforce through efficient and effective recruitment and retention

The College would like to see more positive action to address retention of workforce and sustainability of workforce supply included in the Strategy. This priority area refers to a series of additional reviews which will require to be undertaken. There is mention of support for retention and succession planning which would benefit from some detail of how this priority will be actioned.

Priority three: Effective collaboration across health services, health education providers and other partners

The Strategy mentions that it remains a specialist service provider to rural New South Wales but does not provide detail around how collaboration across health services might be achieved, bolstered, and maintained.

Rural Generalist doctors working across rural NSW are a vital part of the continuum of care for those living in rural and remote communities. They work under unique circumstances and with a scope of practice and working environment which can be very different to urban practice. These doctors are often the only readily available healthcare practitioners in an area, and as such, they may need to take on a range of roles which would ordinarily fall to specialists in larger areas.

Given the important role of Rural Generalists, it is important that their input is considered at all stages of the development of the Strategy and the subsequent ACT Health Services Plan.

Priority four: Developing skilled and highly productive workforce

The interaction between this Strategy, the ACT tertiary system and the rural NSW communities that rely on these specialist services is of particular importance to the College. The Strategy must recognise the difference between rural and remote and urban settings.

The College notes and supports the Productivity Commission statement that “Services should be delivered by a skilled workforce, supported by technology and comprehensive governance arrangements, to ensure that they are responsive to local needs and can be readily ramped up and down as needs change”.

In rural and remote areas, this necessitates developing and supporting a skilled health workforce which can provide as many services as possible, as close to home as possible, with the local General



Practitioner/Rural Generalist being integral to the process either as part of a team or working in solo practice. The provision of appropriate services for patients and support for practitioners and caregivers via telehealth and other mechanisms to complement face-to-face services would be an important component of workforce support.

Better access to an appropriately skilled and locally based primary care practitioners would moderate some of the need for patients and caregivers to travel to seek services, thus minimising resultant economic and social imposts. It is therefore vitally important that the Strategy considers different and changing models of care and service delivery models across the rural areas served by the ACT health system.

College Details

Organisation	Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
Name	Marita Cowie AM
Position	Chief Executive Officer
Location	Level 1, 324 Queen St, PO Box 2507 Brisbane Qld 4001
Email	m.cowie@acrrm.org.au
Phone	07 3105 8200

ACRRM acknowledges Australian Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People as the first inhabitants of the nation. We respect the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia in which our members and staff work and live and pay respect to their Elders past present and future.