

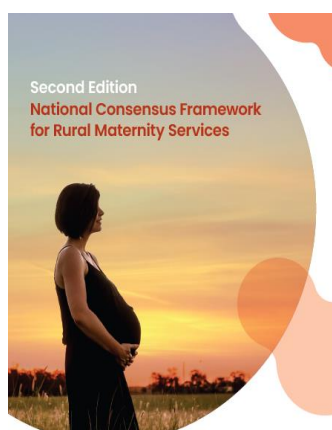
23 June 25

The future of rural and remote maternity; a framework for success

National Consensus Framework for Rural Maternity Services

Closures, bypass and downgrades of rural and remote maternity services put rural and remote women and babies at unprecedented risk.

Following a 41% reduction in rural and remote maternity units since 1992, Peak organisations involved in rural and remote maternity care have come together to collaboratively develop the [Second Edition National Consensus Framework for Rural Maternity Services](#), which provides a framework for safe, evidence based maternity care to prioritise mothers and maternity care providers living outside of urban centres.



This Framework is being commended to Health Ministers, service providers, policy makers, clinicians and communities to support women and their families in accessing quality maternity services in rural and Remote Australia

A National Rural Maternity Forum in August 2023 recognised the need for urgent revision of the 2008 *National Consensus Framework for Rural Maternity Services* with an additional need to address cultural safety, respectful maternity care, continuity of care and carer and the co-design and co-development of maternity services with consumers.

The Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner supported the facilitation of the development of the 2nd Edition, initially led by National Rural Health Commissioner Adjunct Professor Ruth Stewart and later Professor Jenny May AM, who was appointed to the role in

July 2024.

“An updated Framework was needed to ensure rural and remote maternity care remains in focus so that rural and remote women and babies have the equitable care they deserve,” said **National Rural Health Commissioner Professor Jenny May**.

“A rural maternity service is the backbone of healthcare service delivery— keeping families close, communities strong, and ensuring safe beginnings for the next generation, while supporting the sustainability of local industry through a stable and thriving population.”

All signatories urge local, regional state and federal health providers to embrace the Framework and use it to guide decisions around the provision, maintenance and expansion of maternity services to rural and remote communities.

Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, Emma McBride said, “I thank the Rural Health Commissioner and all who have generously contributed to this framework.

“It gives governments, health services and clinicians a valuable set of guiding principles as we work together to improve rural maternity services across the country.

“The Albanese government remains steadfast in our commitment to improve healthcare for women, children and families wherever they live and this framework is a valuable addition to this work.”

Quotes from participating organisations:

Dr RT Lewandowski, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia

“When birthing services are closed, risks for pregnant rural and remote women and their babies increase.

“Women and families often have to travel significant distances or relocate to a town or city with birthing facilities which is expensive, stressful and not acceptable for rural families living in Australia in 2025.

“The Framework will provide the basis for health services to design the right maternity and birthing services as needed by their communities. It has been a privilege to support women and families in rural and remote Australia through this positive collaboration between professional groups.”

Alison Weatherstone, Chief Midwife from the Australian College of Midwives

“Women living in rural and remote areas want to birth close to home and feel reassured that their local birthing services provide access to high quality care and choice, as would be expected in a metropolitan area.

“The Framework provides high level objectives but also very practical actions to make rural maternity services more accessible to women living in rural and remote Australia. It is designed to enable access to maternity care close to home, guide the redesign of services where needed and provide ways to enhance maternity workforce recruitment and retention.

“A key development in the Framework was recognising the importance of providing culturally safe and appropriate maternity care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families, with access to expert maternity care providing continuity of care, Birthing on Country or Birthing in our Community.”

Alecia Staines, Maternity Consumer Network

“Having the ability to access local maternity services was so important for myself and my family, as it is for all rural women. Rural families should not be faced with the prospect of roadside birthing or poorer outcomes than their city cousins simply because of their postcode. We want to see this framework prioritised to make meaningful differences in the lives of the 7 million families that call rural and remote Australia home.”

Susi Tegen, Chief Executive, National Rural Health Alliance

“Every woman and every family deserves access to quality maternity care as close as possible to where they live to bring a baby into the world. The National Rural Health Alliance has been an active

partner in the development of this Consensus Statement and calls on governments to actively fund and support the models of care outlined in this strategic document.”

Dr Rod Martin , President, Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine

“More than 80,000 women gave birth outside major cities in 2022. Access to safe, high-quality maternity care close to home isn’t a luxury—it’s essential to the health and wellbeing of mothers, babies, and their communities.

“Rural Generalists with advanced skills in obstetrics, anaesthetics, and paediatrics are a critical part of the rural maternity team. ACRRM trains and supports these doctors to provide comprehensive, coordinated care where it’s needed most.”

Dr Nisha Khot, President Elect, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

“High-quality rural maternity care is critically important to families on their journey to parenthood. Access to safe, reliable care close to home is invaluable, and allows women to remain within their communities, supported by extended social networks and spared the risks and costs of long-distance travel.

“Support for rural services must account for the needs of our maternity health workforce, ensuring they have the tools and resources they need to provide high quality care without being disadvantaged by choosing to live and work in rural Australia.”

Download: [National Maternity Consensus Framework](#)

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Second Edition National Consensus Framework for Rural Maternity Services signatories:

- Australian College of Midwives (ACM)
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM)
- Maternity Consumer Network (MCN)
- National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners (NAATSIHWP)
- National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA)
- Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner (ONRHC)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
- Rural Doctors' Association of Australia (RDAA)
- Rural Workforce Agency Network (RWA Network)