

Outcome 6

RURAL HEALTH

Access to health services for people living in rural, regional and remote Australia, including through health infrastructure and outreach services

Outcome Strategy

The Australian Government, through Outcome 6, aims to improve access to health services for people living in regional, rural and remote Australia¹ by supporting a range of targeted rural health programs and activities through its ongoing health reform agenda.

People living in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia experience poorer health outcomes than those living in urban areas. Life expectancy in regional areas is one to two years lower, and for remote areas it is up to seven years lower compared with the average in major cities.² People living in regional, rural and remote communities have limited access to primary health care services and are more likely to be admitted to hospital for conditions which could have potentially been prevented through the provision of non-hospital services and care.³ Other factors that impact on the health of people living in rural, regional and remote communities include poor health and aged care service viability, lack of infrastructure development, cost pressures associated with distance and isolation, and the inequitable distribution of the health workforce.⁴

The Australian Government established Rural and Regional Health Australia which will continue to expand outreach services, fund health infrastructure projects in rural areas, and provide advocacy and ongoing support for rural, regional and remote services.⁵ The Australian Government is also seeking to improve whole-of-government reporting on regional service delivery, and the Health and Ageing portfolio will contribute to related initiatives led by the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport.

Outcome 6 is the responsibility of the Primary and Ambulatory Care Division.

¹ Regional, rural and remote Australia is classified using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA). Further information on the ASGC-RA is available at: <www.health.gov.au/internet/otd/Publishing.nsf/Content/RA-intro>.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008. *Rural, regional and remote health indicators of health status and determinants of health*, AIHW, Canberra.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009. *Australian hospital statistics 2007-08*, AIHW, Canberra.

⁴ Information on Australian Government initiatives to improve the capacity of the health workforce in rural, regional and remote areas can be found in Outcome 12 – Health Workforce Capacity in these Portfolio Budget Statements.

⁵ Information on Australian Government initiatives to improve health services infrastructure in rural, regional and remote areas through the Health and Hospitals Fund can be found in Outcome 10 – Health System Capacity and Quality, in these Portfolio Budget Statements.

Program Contributing to Outcome 6

Program 6.1: Rural health services

Outcome 6 Budgeted Expenses and Resources

Table 6.1: Budgeted Expenses and Resources for Outcome 6

	2011-12 Estimated actual \$'000	2012-13 Estimated expenses \$'000
Program 6.1: Rural health services		
Administered expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	101,623	87,230
Departmental expenses		
Departmental appropriation ¹	12,996	11,150
Expenses not requiring appropriation in the budget year ²	642	448
Total for Program 6.1	115,261	98,828
Outcome 6 totals by appropriation type:		
Administered expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	101,623	87,230
Departmental expenses		
Departmental appropriation ¹	12,996	11,150
Expenses not requiring appropriation in the budget year ²	642	448
Total expenses for Outcome 6	115,261	98,828
	2011-12	2012-13
Average staffing level (number)	98	82

¹ Departmental appropriation combines "Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No 1)" and "Revenue from independent sources (s31)".

² Expenses not requiring appropriation in the Budget year are made up of depreciation expense, amortisation expense, makegood expense and audit fees. This estimate also includes approved operating losses - please refer to the departmental financial statements in section 3 for further information.

Program 6.1: Rural health services

Program Objectives

Improve access to health and information services in regional, rural and remote areas

Recognising the difficulties Australians in rural and regional areas face in accessing health services, the Australian Government established Rural and Regional Health Australia. The new agency, through its website and freecall 1800 number⁶, provides Australians with a centralised point where they can obtain health information and access services. In 2012-13, Rural and Regional Health Australia will continue to offer advice and assistance to the public as well as providing a strong leadership role in developing health and aged care initiatives targeted at rural and regional Australia.

The Australian Government will continue to fund the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver essential health services to people in rural and remote areas. These health services include primary aero-medical evacuations, primary and community health care clinics, remote consultations including by telephone, and medical chests (pharmaceutical and medical supplies) for remote locations.

The Government, through the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP), will continue to fund essential health infrastructure (capital works and/or equipment) in rural and remote communities, and strategic service planning for small rural private hospitals, improving opportunities for partnerships, multidisciplinary approaches and recruitment. In 2012-13, the Department will manage in excess of 100 active NRRHIP projects. It is anticipated that a seventh funding round of NRRHIP will be conducted in late 2012-13.

Provide rural health outreach services

In 2012-13, the Government will support the delivery of more than 80,000 patient contacts through the Rural Health Outreach Fund. Funded organisations will consult with stakeholder groups to identify community needs and the Department will continue to work with these organisations to ensure outreach services are targeted at those needs.

The fund will continue to support the delivery of all medical specialties and a range of primary health care services in rural, regional and remote Australia. These include, but are not limited to, multi-disciplinary maternity services, eye health services, the coordination of outreach services, and services by female GPs. The Government will also continue to support funded organisations to develop and apply strategies to recruit and retain health service providers in rural areas.

Program 6.1 is linked as follows:

- The Department of Human Services (Medicare Australia – Program 1.1) to administer outreach health services.

⁶ Available at: <www.ruralhealthaustralia.gov.au> and 1800 899 538.

Program 6.1 Expenses

Table 6.2 Program Expenses

	2011-12 Estimated actual \$'000	2012-13 Budget \$'000	2013-14 Forward year 1 \$'000	2014-15 Forward year 2 \$'000	2015-16 Forward year 3 \$'000
Annual administered expenses					
Ordinary annual services	101,623	87,230	98,634	100,678	102,765
Program support	13,638	11,598	11,668	11,617	11,721
Total Program 6.1 expenses	115,261	98,828	110,302	112,295	114,486

Program 6.1: Deliverables⁷

Table 6.3: Qualitative Deliverables for Program 6.1

Qualitative Deliverables	2012-13 Reference Point or Target
Provide rural health outreach services	
Hold first funding round of the Rural Health Outreach Fund	Funding round held before 30 June 2013

⁷ In 2012-13, all deliverables and key performance indicators have been reviewed and updated to ensure targeted performance reporting.

Table 6.4: Quantitative Deliverables for Program 6.1

Quantitative Deliverables	2011-12 Revised Budget	2012-13 Budget Target	2013-14 Forward Year 1	2014-15 Forward Year 2	2015-16 Forward Year 3
Improve access to health and information services in regional, rural and remote areas					
Number of rural locations visited by female GPs	170	170	170	170	170
Number of new projects funded annually through the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program	40	40	40	40	40
Provide rural health outreach services					
Number of communities receiving outreach services through the Rural Health Outreach Fund	135	135	140	145	145

Program 6.1: Key Performance Indicators

Table 6.5: Qualitative Key Performance Indicators for Program 6.1

Qualitative Indicator	2012-13 Reference Point or Target
Improve access to health and information services in regional, rural and remote areas	
Rural and Regional Health Australia Information Service provides accurate, quality place-based information	Regular reporting and revision of the Information Service to maintain information accuracy and quality
Provide rural health outreach services	
Ongoing medical specialist, GP, and allied and other health services provided through the Rural Health Outreach Fund meet the needs of regional, rural and remote communities	Organisations funded to support rural outreach will consult with stakeholder groups, and will be guided by Advisory Forums and Indigenous Health Partnership Forums, to identify community needs

Table 6.6: Quantitative Key Performance Indicators for Program 6.1

Quantitative Indicators	2011-12 Revised Budget	2012-13 Budget Target	2013-14 Forward Year 1	2014-15 Forward Year 2	2015-16 Forward Year 3
Improve access to health and information services in regional, rural and remote areas					
Number of patients attending Royal Flying Doctor Service clinics	39,000	39,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Provide rural health outreach services					
Number of patient contacts supported through the Rural Health Outreach Fund ⁸	80,000	80,000	100,000	120,000	140,000

⁸ Estimates have been revised since the 2011-12 Portfolio Budget Statements.