

Outcome 6

Rural Health

Improved health outcomes for Australians living in regional, rural and remote locations

OUTCOME SUMMARY

Outcome 6 focuses on improving health outcomes for people living in rural, regional and remote communities. This will be achieved through the Australian Government's reforms to frontline care, which will help people living in these areas to have better, more affordable access and more holistic, better quality medical and specialist services. The Government aims to achieve this outcome by supporting a range of targeted rural health programs and activities through its reform agenda. The Government also funds a number of other rural health initiatives across other portfolio outcomes.¹

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

Key Strategic Directions

- Improve access to health and specialist medical services for people in rural and remote communities by targeting areas of high need.
- Improve health infrastructure in rural and remote communities where lack of infrastructure is a barrier to the establishment or enhancement of health services.

Under other outcomes, the Government will also:

- Support training for GP registrars in rural and urban areas (Outcome 5).
- Improve the supply of all health professions in rural, regional and outer suburban Australia (Outcome 12).

Major Activities

Improved Access to Rural Health Services

The Australian Government will work collaboratively with State and Territory governments to improve health outcomes for people in rural and remote areas. In particular, the Department will contribute to the work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health and Ageing Working Group.

In February 2008, the Australian Government completed an audit of health workforce shortages in rural and regional Australia. The Government will use the findings of the audit to inform the national health reform agenda, including ways to improve the provision of health services in rural areas. A particular focus for the Department will be the development of policies and programs that support access to integrated primary health care services with a focus on preventative health measures.

¹ A list of rural health initiatives by outcome can be found later in this chapter.

The challenges faced by rural communities in accessing health services are complex. Workforce and service delivery measures are interdependent elements of any strategy to improve health outcomes in rural and regional Australia.

The Australian Government is committed to improving rural and remote community access to a range of medical specialist services through the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program. The program addresses the comparatively higher burden of disease of people in rural and remote communities by reducing waiting lists for patients to obtain treatment. The provision of outreach services by medical specialists to people in rural and remote communities also reduces the need for patients to travel to metropolitan areas to access services, minimises loss of income, reduces interruptions to education for children and means people undergoing treatment are not removed from their communities and networks.

Challenges in implementing the program include meeting the unmet need for medical specialist services, in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and securing the services of specialists with expertise in the areas of medicine identified as priorities for people living in rural and remote communities. Fund holder organisations in each state and the Northern Territory will work closely with the medical fraternity to engage specialists to participate in the program.

The Government will also establish an Office of Rural Health to drive the Government's reform agenda in Rural Health. The establishment of this Office represents the first step in the Government's response to the audit of Australia's rural and regional health workforce. Over the next year, the Government will continue to respond to this report through reforms of current geographic classification systems, and review all programs that support rural health professionals and rural health services.

Funding for these major activities is sourced from Program 6.1 – Rural Health Services.

Improving Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure

In 2008-09, the Australian Government will introduce a new competitive grant program that will create improved opportunities for partnerships and multidisciplinary approaches to the delivery of health care in rural and remote communities through better access to funding for infrastructure. The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP) will amalgamate the Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) and the Rural Private Access (RPA) Program. The NRRHIP will encompass the broadened eligibility criteria for the RMIF announced by the Government, in addition to criteria relating to the RPA Program.

Funding for these major activities is sourced from Program 6.1 – Rural Health Services.

Rural Health Initiatives by Outcome

Outcome	Rural Health Activity
Outcome 2	Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance/Start-up and Succession Allowance Rural Pharmacy Workforce Program Rural Pharmacy Pre-Registration Allowance
Outcome 3	Visiting Optometrists Scheme Higher Bulk Billing Incentives for GPs in Regional, Rural and Remote Areas, Tasmania and Metropolitan Areas (also Outcome 5) Additional Practice Nurses in Rural and Remote Australia and Other Areas of Need – Medicare Items
Outcome 4	Multipurpose Services Program Rural and Regional Building Fund Aged Care Adjustment Grants for Small Rural Facilities Australian Government Aged Care Nursing Scholarship Program Training for Rural and Remote Aged Care Staff Viability Supplement for Community Aged Care in Rural and Remote Areas
Outcome 5	Practice Incentives Program including: Domestic Violence Incentive; Procedural GP Payment; Rural Loading; and Rural Practice Nurse Incentive Additional Practice Nurses in Rural Australia and Other Areas of Need – Practice Incentives Program payment Higher Bulk Billing Incentives for GPs in Regional, Rural and Remote Areas, Tasmania and Metropolitan Areas (also Outcome 3) Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas (Council of Australian Governments) (also Outcome 11) Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative Training for Rural and Remote Procedural GPs Program Rural and Remote General Practice Rural Locum Relief Program Rural Other Medical Practitioners Program Prevocational GP Placements Program Rural Undergraduate Support and Coordination Program Rural Women’s GP Service Rural Retention Program More Allied Health Services Program HECS Reimbursement Scheme

Outcome	Rural Health Activity
Outcome 5 (cont)	New General Practitioner Registrars Program (includes Rural Registrars Incentive Payments Scheme) Workforce Support for Rural General Practitioner Strengthening the Health Workforce in Rural and Remote Areas and in Indigenous Communities
Outcome 6	Multipurpose Centre Program Royal Flying Doctor Service Regional Health Services Building Healthy Communities and National Rural Primary Health Project Rural Private Access Program Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund
Outcome 10	Supporting Women in Rural Areas Diagnosed with Breast Cancer Rural Palliative Care Project
Outcome 11	Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas (Council of Australian Governments) – also Outcome 5
Outcome 12	Additional Practice Nurses in Rural Australia and Other Areas of Need – Training and Support Rural Clinical Schools University Departments of Rural Health Rural Australia Medical Undergraduate Scheme Australian Rural and Remote Health Professional Scholarship Scheme Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships John Flynn Scholarship Rural Undergraduate Support and Coordination Program Rural Health Support, Education and Training Program Rural Health Education Foundation Rural and Remote Nursing Scholarship Program Rural Allied Health Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme Rural Allied Health Undergraduate and Postgraduate Scholarships Schemes Advanced Specialist Training Posts in Rural Areas Rural Advanced Specialist Training Support Support Scheme for Rural Specialists
Outcome 13	Improving Access to Primary Care Services in Rural and Remote Areas (Council of Australian Governments)

Outcome 6 Resourcing

Table 6.1 shows how the 2008-09 Budget appropriations translate to total resourcing for Outcome 6, including administered expenses, revenue from government (appropriations), revenue from other sources, and the total price of outputs.

Table 6.1: Total Resources for Outcome 6

	2008-09 Total estimate of available resources \$'000	2007-08 Estimated actual \$'000
Outcome 6 Administered and Departmental Output Resources		
Program 6.1: Rural Health Services		
<i>Administered Items</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	167,343	136,883
<i>Departmental Outputs</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	11,612	11,526
Revenues from other sources (s.31) for goods and services	235	237
Subtotal for Program 6.1	179,190	148,646
Total Resources for Outcome 6	179,190	148,646
Outcome 6 Resources by Departmental Output Group		
Department of Health and Ageing		
Output Group 1: Policy Advice	1,872	1,859
Output Group 2: Program Management	9,975	9,904
Total Departmental Resources	11,847	11,763
	2008-09	2007-08
Average Staffing Level (Number)	95.4	96.2

Measures Affecting Outcome 6

A summary of measures affecting this outcome is provided at Table 1.3.1, Section 1. Measure descriptions are published in full in *Budget Paper No. 2, Budget Measures 2008-09*, available on the Australian Government website at <<http://www.budget.gov.au>>.

Contribution of Administered Programs

Program 6.1 – Rural Health Services

The Rural Health Services Program funds a range of services in rural and remote areas, including specialist, allied and community health services. It supports emergency evacuations and privately insurable health services. The program also provides funding for coordination grants for small community health care services, and prevention and promotion activities in remote communities. The contribution to this outcome is measured through improved access to specialist and primary care services and infrastructure support, for people in rural and remote communities.

Contribution of Departmental Outputs to Outcome 6

The Department describes its core activities in terms of two output groups: policy advice and program management. Outcome 6 reports on both output groups. Refer to Section 2.1 for more information on output groups.

Performance Information for Outcome 6

Performance information for administered programs, individual outputs and output groups relating to Outcome 6 are summarised in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Key Performance Information for Outcome 6

Performance Information for Administered Programs

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Program 6.1 – Rural Health Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administered Items 	
Provision of ongoing primary health services in rural and remote areas.	Services are updated and expanded to reflect needs.
Provision of health infrastructure in rural and remote communities to support the establishment of new, or the enhancement of existing, health services.	All funding is committed to health infrastructure projects by 30 June 2009.

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Program 6.1 – Rural Health Services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered Items 	
Improved access to medical specialist services for people living in rural and remote communities.	Existing medical specialist outreach services are maintained and additional services and projects are developed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental Outputs² 	
Resourcing: \$179.190m	

Performance Information for Departmental Outputs

In relation to the following program:

- 6.1: Rural Health Services.

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Output Group 1 – Policy Advice	
Quality, relevant and timely advice for Australian Government decision-making measured by Ministerial satisfaction.	Ministerial satisfaction.
Production of relevant and timely evidence-based policy research.	Relevant evidence-based policy research produced in a timely manner.
Output Group 1 Resourcing: \$1.872m	

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Output Group 2 – Program Management	
Administered budget predictions are met and actual expenses vary less than 0.5% from budgeted expenses measured by comparison of actual expenses against budget.	0.5% variance from budgeted expenses.

² The Department has four standard performance indicators for departmental output groups. See 'Performance Information for Departmental Outputs' for further information.

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Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Output Group 2 – Program Management	
Stakeholders participate in program development through a range of avenues, such as surveys and forums.	<p>Regional Health Services conducted annual and biannual forums to discuss program issues.</p> <p>Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program hosts an annual fundholders meeting to review and monitor program administration, and advisory forum in each state and territory to identify service priorities.</p>
Output Group 2 Resourcing: \$9.975m	