



The Hon Emma McBride MP
Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health

Ref No: MS24-000830

Professor Jenny May AM
National Rural Health Commissioner
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Dear Professor May

Congratulations on your appointment as the National Rural Health Commissioner (NRHC). I am pleased to provide you with the Statement of Expectations (SOE) for your appointment (2 September 2024 to 30 June 2026).

Making sure all Australians have access to quality, affordable and safe health care is a key priority of the Australian Government. The Government recognises the unique challenges facing people living in regional, rural, remote and very remote areas accessing healthcare. The Government is committed to Strengthening Medicare and rolling out important health reforms to respond to the needs of people living outside of our cities.

Your appointment is vital to ensure the voices of rural and remote Australians are heard and listened to. The NRHC provides important health policy advice and advocates for reforms that support better access to safe, quality and affordable health care in rural, regional and remote Australia.

The SOE, and your responding Statement of Intent, are key elements of sound governance for the office of the NRHC. Your Statement of Intent should outline the activities needed to meet the SOE and how you plan to deliver them. The SOE and your response complement the requirements for the NRHC set out in Part VA of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

I look forward to working with you to improve healthcare for all Australians, especially those living in the rural and remote areas.

Yours sincerely

Emma McBride

12/9/2024

Encl (1) Statement of Expectations

Statement of Expectations for the National Rural Health Commissioner

2 September 2024 – 30 June 2026

Purpose

This Statement sets out the Australian Government's expectations for the National Rural Health Commissioner (Commissioner). It directs the Commissioner in performing functions under Schedule 1, Part VA of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* (Act).

Role

The Commissioner is a statutory appointment, responsible to the Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health. The Commissioner will act independently and impartially in performing the functions and in exercising their powers set out in the Act. The Commissioner will provide advice to the Government about matters relating to health in regional, rural, remote and very remote Australia. The Commissioner will support implementation of government strategies, priorities, and measures to improve access to quality and affordable healthcare.

The Commissioner will consult with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure a diversity of voices are taken into account in Government decision making. The Commissioner will work collaboratively with the Department of Health and Aged Care to make the most of the expertise and corporate knowledge held by the department.

Priorities

Contribute to Strengthening Medicare through developing and promoting innovative, integrated and multidisciplinary approaches

The Commissioner will:

- advise on the Government's responses to key primary health care reviews and assist with implementation of rural and remote health measures.
- collaborate with Commonwealth, state and territory governments on evidenced-based models of primary care and advocate for approaches that support sustainable and integrated health workforce development.
- advise on opportunities to address inequities in access to healthcare in rural and regional settings, from a geographic and socioeconomic perspective.

Contribute to primary care, rural workforce, and training reforms

The Commissioner will:

- provide evidence-based advice on the development of strategies and initiatives aimed at improving access to all health services in rural and remote areas.
- collaborate with stakeholders to advise on strategies and frameworks that enable rural and remote service improvements in line with contemporary practice.

Support First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing

The Commissioner will work in partnership with First Nations people, peak bodies, and other stakeholders to implement the Closing the Gap reforms to:

- support workforce planning and solutions to ensure First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing is at the heart of decision making.

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- support First Nations peoples to receive culturally safe care when and where they need it. This includes encouraging cultural awareness and competence among non-First Nations health professionals.
- support the increase of attraction, retention and career development for First Nations people in the health workforce.

Support urgent and emerging priorities

The Commissioner will:

- advise of potential, and actual, rural health risks, and provide practical options.
- assist the independent review of the functions of the Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner in 2025 (Part VA of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*).
- assist with the design and implementation of response strategies on disaster and recovery advice for rural, remote and very remote communities in consultation with the National Emergency Management Agency.

Stakeholder relationships

The Commissioner will undertake consultation with stakeholders, including:

- regional, rural, remote and very remote communities, service providers and consumers, including Aboriginal community-controlled and other targeted services.
- peak bodies, universities, and health professional colleges.
- state and territory governments.
- Primary Health Networks (PHNs).
- Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs).
- Departmental senior executives and other Commissioners with portfolio linkages.
- Involvement in or leadership of various committees, taskforces, and working groups.
- Ministers and their offices, other parliamentarians and their offices, upon request and with the approval of the Assistant Minister
- the Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health.

Organisational governance

The Commissioner is supported by two Deputy Commissioners with expertise across allied health and nursing to support a multidisciplinary approach.

The Department's Health Workforce Division and Corporate Operations Group can provide advice on issues that may impact the Commissioner's ability to fulfill their role and statutory objectives, including the Government's governance and reporting requirements.

Activity Work Plan

The Commissioner will develop and maintain an Activity Work Plan (Plan) that outlines the activities the Office will progress to deliver the priorities set out in this document. The Commissioner can propose additional priorities that can be achieved during their term. The Plan will be delivered to the Assistant Minister by 31 October 2024 and will include indicators for measuring progress and timeframes for delivery.

The Assistant Minister may task the Commissioner with additional specific projects or inquiries, which will be communicated via written correspondence.

The Plan will be updated every six months to include progress against the indicators, risk and issues identified, and new and emerging priorities as they arise. Each update will be provided to the Assistant Minister and the Department of Health and Aged Care.

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