



How the 2022–23 Budget is building upon the Stronger Rural Health Strategy

The Australian Government is investing \$296.5 million in regional, rural and remote health in 2022–23, to ensure all Australians benefit from quality health services no matter where they live.

The health and wellbeing of Australians living in regional, rural, remote and very remote Australia is a priority for the Australian Government.

The 2022–23 Budget includes rural health spending in these areas:

- Improved Access to Diagnostic Imaging - \$66 million
- Increased opportunities for rural health and medical training - \$152.5 million
- Aeromedical and health outreach services - \$56.8 million
- Appointment of a Senior Midwifery Advisor - \$1.2 million

Rural health workforce

Helping our regional, rural and remote areas grow the number of local doctors, nurses and allied health workers to ensure equity of access is a focus of the Government and its investment in rural health is driven by the *Stronger Rural Health Strategy*.

Over the past decade, there have been significant developments in delivering improvements to rural health. Under the Strategy, GP full-time equivalent (FTE) in regional rural and remote areas of Australia has grown by 3.2% compound annual growth, more than twice the rate of population growth:

- between 2016–17 and 2020–21, 1300 extra GPs working in regional, rural and remote areas
- between 2016–17 and 2020–21, 1200 extra nurses working in regional, rural and remote areas, and
- between 2016–17 and 2020–21, 2500 extra allied health professionals working in regional, rural and remote areas.

The Australian Government's 2022–23 Budget includes support for primary care, mental health, health and medical training across regional, rural and remote Australia.

Improved Access to Diagnostic Imaging

- \$66 million over four years, to deregulate and expand Medicare funded magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) services in regional, rural and remote areas (Modified Monash Model (MMM) 2–7 areas) from 1 November 2022, improving access to critical diagnostic imaging services to more regional and rural Australians.
- MRI services are critical for the diagnosis of many soft-tissue illnesses and disease, including cancer. Improving access to MRI, through this deregulation measure, will reduce pressure on out of pocket costs for many patients and may reduce the need to travel to access these services.

Increased opportunities for rural health and medical training

- \$36.2 million to establish two new University Departments of Rural Health, in the South West (Edith Cowan University) and Goldfields (Curtin University) regions of Western Australia. This will deliver 3,000 additional placement weeks per year for up to 500 more students as part of our commitment to build a stronger health workforce in rural, regional and remote communities:
 - UDRHs provide training to students across a range of health disciplines and settings, including aged care, disability and rehabilitation services, childcare, schools, community facilities, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.
- \$99.3 million towards rural medical education and training, including 80 additional Commonwealth supported places, to allow medical schools to offer more students, especially those in regional and rural Australia, the opportunity to take up medical school education and training.
- \$14.8 million under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program to Charles Sturt University (CSU) to deliver a Rural Clinical School.
- \$2.1 million over four years for the continuation of the National Rural Health Students Network of Rural Health Clubs in universities which have a RHMT program, encouraging students from the program to establish and grow their networks among fellow students.

Aeromedical and health outreach services

- \$56.8 million for aeromedical services which ensure people in rural and remote Australia can access health services, including primary care and dental clinics, regardless of their distance from other medical services, including:
 - \$33.3 million over four years from 2022–23, for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in addition to their current funding of \$84 million per year, to establish a new 10 Year Strategic Agreement and address immediate cost pressures
 - \$18 million to guarantee rescue services and emergency aeromedical services in the Northern Territory through CareFlight, and
 - \$4.1 million for Little Wings to provide aeromedical support for seriously ill children across NSW, ACT and Queensland.
- \$17.2 million for Heart of Australia, to provide 5 mobile clinics travelling across 34 communities in regional, rural and remote Queensland. These services will deliver diagnostic, treatment and follow-up care, including cardiology, endocrinology, sleep medicine, psychiatry, geriatric medicine, immunology, general medicine, neurology, gastroenterology and gynaecology, and in 2022 will commence providing CT and x-ray services.

Mental Health in regional, rural and remote areas

The Australian Government is also investing in delivery of mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention services in regional, rural and remote communities, including:

- \$8.5 million to continue investment in the successful Red Dust Program to provide culturally appropriate support in remote Northern Territory communities, focused on social and emotional wellbeing, sexual health, relationships, alcohol and other drugs, and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- \$42.7 million to establish specialised regional initiatives for suicide prevention through primary health networks, strengthening the capacity for communities to implement system-wide responses to reduce risk of suicide in their region.
- \$8.6 million to establish the *National Closing the Gap Policy Partnership on Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Mental Health)* to maintain momentum in reducing the devastating and disproportionate impact of mental ill-health and suicide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.
- \$14.3 million for programs delivered by headspace to provide services to support young Australians in need, including
 - the Schools Suicide Prevention Activities Program
 - headspace Digital Work and Study Program, and
 - Flying headspace Program.
- \$1.8 million towards the Raising Children Network, to maintain the Raising Healthy Minds app, improving the mental health literacy of Australian parents and carers to identify the signs of social or emotional problems in their child

Appointment of a Senior Midwifery Advisor

- \$1.2 million to appoint Senior Midwifery Advisor to improve the quality of policies and programs implementing the *Woman-Centred Care: Strategic Directions for Australian Maternity Services* and to work with the Rural Health Commissioner, as part of the Government's commitment to improving access to maternity services in rural and remote communities

These investments complement efforts across government to promote regionalisation by providing additional supports to regional communities and, consequently, reducing the gap in mental healthcare and suicide prevention services compared with metropolitan centres.

For further information, refer to the relevant fact sheets.

Why is this important?

Australians, no matter where they live, deserve access to high quality health and aged care services. The Australian Government is committed to ensuring adequate support is provided so that even remote areas and those with low populations can access the care that locals need, when they need it.

The Australian Government's range of investments and programs helps ensure that rural, regional and remote Australians can access services including primary care and medicines, mental health care, aged care, and preventive health programs.

Who will benefit?

Approximately one third of Australians, around 8.5 million people, live outside the nation's metropolitan centres. This population is spread across regional, rural and remote communities, and for many people, access to quality health care services, providers and workers can be limited.

The Australian Government's commitment to regional, rural and remote health includes broad-based and targeted measures to improve health for a wide range of groups in rural communities who have diverse and specific health needs, including women, multicultural communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and senior Australians.

The Australian Government's continued commitment to invest in rural and regional health will help people experiencing mental health issues and/or suicidal distress, and means all Australians can benefit from quality health services no matter where they live.

How much will this cost?

Combined, the Australian Government is investing around \$296.5 million in programs and initiatives that will improve the health of Australians in regional, rural and remote locations.