

'Health ready' for all eventualities

Chris Baggoley¹

¹Australian Government Chief Medical Officer

Rural and remote Australia is at the frontline of many challenges to the nation—environmental disasters such as floods and fires, risks of animal-borne infections, particular vulnerability to epidemics (including in remote areas and in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities), industrial accidents (farming, mining) and work-related health challenges (FIFO, mental health).

These challenges are faced by a rural and remote health sector that may already be stretched—through distances and workforce shortages—yet the resilience of rural communities in the face of adversity is well recognised. This resilience is one of the bases of successful innovation, but while it can be celebrated it should not be a reason for minimising access to mainstream health and other public services in such areas.

I will talk about systemic ways to ensure that rural communities are 'health ready' for all eventualities, including through innovative ways to overcome workforce shortages and through telehealth and the eHealth record.

I will also draw on past experience to talk about systemic approaches to safety and quality that can leave people in rural and remote communities feeling more at risk. Many rural services are concerned that setting the bar too high can result in service closure—and the risks associated with no local health care, including delays in receiving treatment, road and travel risks and family stresses.

