

From evidence to action

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Providing safe, effective and sustainable rural health services, particularly for smaller communities, has been an enduring problem in Australia. Particular problems have been identified in attracting and retaining an appropriate health workforce and in providing services that are both appropriate and safe. While there have been many programs, particularly in relation to health workforce and innovative service models (such as ‘fly-in/fly-out’) little seems to have changed.

Some new structural arrangements implemented through the National Health Reform Agenda, such as Medicare Locals and Local Health Districts/Networks have potential to facilitate more sustainable health services, but in isolation their impact could well be negligible. Research undertaken through the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute and others suggests that real improvements are more likely to result from whole-of-system approaches that integrate economic, social and health initiatives.

A fresh policy approach is needed—one that provides consistent national policy, adequate funding and more local flexibility with improved accountability.

