

Growing rural general practice through business support

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Background: Studies have identified that the viability of rural and remote general practice rests not only upon such factors as financial incentives and rural training, but also upon issues to do with the business and human resource management of small rural practices.

As a leader in rural and remote health workforce information and knowledge, Rural Health West established the Practice and Business Support Service in early 2011 to assist rural general practices develop, enhance and deliver quality, viable general practice services, through the provision of business and human resource management support.

Aim: The aim of the Rural Health West Practice and Business Support Service is to assist rural general practices with the ongoing needs of managing a viable business that provides quality health care to the local population.

This aids in improving retention rates of the health workforce and increasing the attractiveness of practices to staff to support succession and expansion planning, as well as enhance the profitability of the practice.

Services provided: The Rural Health West Practice and Business Support Service provides a range of services to assist rural general practices with business processes including;

- practice assessment visits
- accreditation preparation
- scholarships for training of Indigenous workforce, templates and resources including contracts, business plans, position descriptions, learning guides and fact sheets
- Practice Management Business Support Tool
- Practice Policy and Procedure Manual
- webinar training sessions.

Services are tailored to the individual practice and designed to address the education, training and support barriers of distance and isolation commonly experienced in rural and remote Australia.

Results: To date the Rural Health West Practice and Business Support Service has provided rural general practices with 85 contracts and employment agreements for practice managers, practice nurses, medical receptionists and medical practitioners; 152 Practice Management Business Support Tools containing 91 fact sheets, resources and templates; 21 rural and remote practice assessment visits with follow-up reports, personalised support, training and assistance; seven fully paid scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner training; three Rural General Practice Manager of the Year awards and 42 webinar training sessions attracting over 200 practice registrations.

This presentation will demonstrate the need for ongoing business support for practice principals, practice managers and staff in rural and remote areas to ensure the delivery of quality, sustainable health care.