

The future for health workforce in rural Australia

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Governments worldwide are working towards implementing the goal of universal health coverage—the goal that all people obtain the health services they need without risking financial hardship. The availability of qualified personnel is critical to access and quality of care. Rural and remote Australians have for many years contended with geographic maldistribution of Australia's health workforce (meaning shortages in non-metropolitan areas), and the unbalanced distribution of health workforce between and within countries is a significant and longstanding problem worldwide. Epidemiological and demographic transitions (ageing populations, higher rates of chronic disease), as well as new technologies and changing patterns of demand for health care, are putting pressures on old structures—and health systems both here and abroad are being required to develop their sub-acute, chronic and rehabilitative capacity. New workforce models (including medical and allied health generalism), funding structures, cross-country mobility of health professionals and other policy levers will have a role to play in shaping our rural health workforce over the next two decades.