

6 November 2021



## MEDIA RELEASE

### ARHEN welcomes rural mental health recommendations

The Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) today welcomed the [Final Report](#) from the House Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and the recommendations to improve access to services for people in rural and remote Australia.

The Committee recommended the Australian Government leverage the existing Australian Rural Health Education Network by providing funding for clinical placements in regional, rural and remote university clinics and using these clinics to trial multi-disciplinary, hybrid mental health hubs that integrate digital services and face to face services (recommendation 11).

Christine Howard, Chair of ARHEN, welcomed the Committee's strong support for the University Departments of Rural Health and their role in building and supporting the rural and remote health workforce and services.

"For more than twenty years the University Departments of Rural Health have been training health students from a range of allied health disciplines such as nursing, occupational therapy, psychology and pharmacy to work in rural and remote locations.

With appropriate additional resourcing our rurally-based university campuses would be well-placed to deliver on the Committee's recommendation to trial mental health clinics and hubs which may offer a mix of digital and face to face services for people in rural and remote regions.

The COVID pandemic has meant many of our university centres have transitioned to hybrid service delivery and have the digital infrastructure and skills to take such a proposal to scale in their regions.

This would help to address local gaps in mental health service delivery and ease the pressure on existing services as well as building the skills and capabilities of health students and rural health professionals.

The University Departments of Rural Health have strong working relationships with their local health services and community-based organisations and are experienced in co-designing services to meet local needs, including working with Indigenous communities and services.

**Australian Rural Health Education Network**  
**Leading Australian rural and remote health education and research**

ARHEN thanks the Committee for its deliberations and stands ready to support the Australian Government with the implementation of the Committee's recommendations in rural and remote Australia" Mrs Howard said.

### **About ARHEN**

ARHEN is the national association and peak body for the 16 University Departments based in rural and remote locations across Australia. Our purpose is to improve rural and remote health outcomes by delivering high quality health education, research and advocacy.

Across Australia, thousands of health students undertake a rural or remote clinical placement every year as part of their undergraduate or postgraduate training. These student placements are helping to build the rural and remote health workforce of the future.

The ARHEN Chair, Christine Howard is also the Director of the Three Rivers Department of Rural Health based at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga and is available for interview.

**Media contact: Joanne Hutchinson, National Director, 0404 822 421.**