

JustHealth Consultants is the consultancy service of AHHA, launched to support Australian healthcare organisations at national, state, regional hospital and community levels across all sectors to meet complex governance and organisational requirements of today's healthcare system.

SERVICE EXAMPLE:

RURAL WORKFORCE: GENERAL PRACTICE AND PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Client	Western NSW Primary Health Network
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Services	To undertake research, stakeholder consultation and modelling to support securing the future of rural and remote general practice and primary health care services in small towns and communities in the Western NSW region
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Context	<p>The future of general practice and primary health care services in small towns and communities in the Western NSW Primary Health Network (PHN) region is at a critical point. 41 towns (approximately 20% of the population) are projected to be at risk of not having a general practice in their communities within the next 10 years.</p> <p>The challenges facing rural and remote health services, including the recruitment and retention of the required workforce and the sustainability of general practices, are well documented and continue to persist after decades of activity at the national, state, regional and community level.</p> <p>While activity at the national and state levels must continue, there is broad agreement at the regional and community level that there is a need to work differently.</p> <p>AHHA was engaged to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Review the state of general practice in the Western NSW PHN region▪ Use national, state and regional data sets to support defining vulnerable small towns, prioritising those for action within the Western NSW PHN region▪ Review general practice and primary health care models and strategies that work elsewhere (in Australia and internationally), and consult with a broad range of stakeholders across the region to elicit their perceptions of these models and strategies in terms of potential effectiveness and feasibility for implementation in the Western NSW PHN region.
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Approach

AHHA established a team with significant experience, credibility and expertise in health workforce and service delivery, and an extensive track record in managing and leading engagement and consultation with stakeholders across multidisciplinary teams, services and sectors.

An environmental scan and desktop review were undertaken to understand the state of general practice.

Data sets were identified and mapped to model the small towns across the region, identifying strengths and vulnerabilities according to features such as remoteness, population size and mix, the existing availability of providers, general practice utilisation, hospitalisation, and medical staff costs for the Local Health District. A level of risk was assigned that reflected the town's capacity for sustaining general practice services.

Models and strategies pursued in Australia and internationally that address the challenges facing rural and remote health services were reviewed. Each model was considered with reflection on the extent to which the model and its associated strategies address requirements essential for sustainable primary health care services: Governance, management and leadership; Workforce organisation and supply; Funding; Linkages; Infrastructure.¹

Interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders in the Western NSW region elicited their perceptions of different models and strategies in terms of potential effectiveness and feasibility for implementation in the local context.

Result

While the primary focus of the interviews was the sustainability of general practice, it was clear that models and strategies had to be considered in the context of sustainable primary health care and the broader health sector.

The work undertaken will allow the PHN in the future to:

- target strategies to improve the sustainability of general practice and access to quality primary health care;
- provide a framework for developing community profiles, driving a collective focus for generation and collection of more nuanced data, as feasible; and
- support ongoing monitoring of community vulnerabilities and modelling of strategies to address these.

Date completed November 2019

¹ A systematic review of primary health care delivery models in rural and remote Australia 1993-2006; 2006. At: <https://rsph.anu.edu.au/research/projects/systematic-review-primary-health-care-delivery-models-rural-and-remote-australia>