

SARRAH

Services for Australian
Rural and Remote Allied Health

Media Release

10 August 2021

Attract, Connect, Stay: Rural communities are leading the way in solving their own health workforce shortages

Three local government areas (LGAs) in north-western NSW have been selected to participate in a research project to address their long-standing health workforce shortages. **Glen Innes, Gwydir Shire and Narrabri LGAs** will work with a research team headed by Dr Cath Cosgrave to establish, fund and manage a Health Workforce Recruiter & Connector (HWRC) position.

"We have had a fantastic response from interested communities to establish the Health Workforce Recruiter & Connector positions" said Dr Cosgrave. "The successful towns should be congratulated for their commitment to ensuring their residents have access to a range of health professionals needed to keep people healthy."

The purpose of the HWRC is to build networks to better identify and successfully attract health professionals (allied health, doctors and nurses) who are a 'strong fit' for the local community. A core focus of the role is to provide tailored support to newly recruited health workers and their family members with settling in, making connections and thriving- in-place (including employment support for partners).

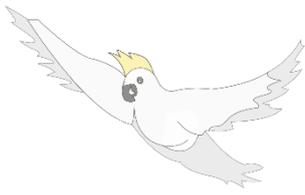
Attract, Connect, Stay is a two-year project funded by the **Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR)** and auspiced by **Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)** - the peak body representing rural and remote allied health professionals.

*"It is essential that rural and remote communities get better access to health services," said Cath Maloney, CEO of SARRAH. "We are seeing more people moving from the city to rural communities because of the many benefits of a rural lifestyle. To support this movement we also need to see comparable growth in the health services available in regional Australia. We need to see more community-led and innovative projects like **Attract Connect Stay** to ensure rural and remote communities have access to health professionals to the same extent as their city-based counterparts."*

The HWRC model was originally developed ten years ago in the Canadian township of Marathon, a small rural town with approximately 3,300 residents. A consortium of local health, local government and business stakeholders created the position to address a chronic shortage of GPs at the time and since then has continued to fund, govern and manage the position. Outcomes from having this dedicated health workforce role for over a decade include no health staffing shortages and the successful attraction and retention of a broad range of health professionals.

The **Attract, Connect, Stay** research project is headed by Dr Cath Cosgrave, supported by a team of researchers (Drs Malatzky, Waller, Boyce, Moran) all with experience in the creation and implementation of innovative rural health workforce solutions. The project is assisted by an Advisory Group, chaired by SARRAH, and including representatives from: NSW Rural Doctors Network, Primary Health Network (Hunter New England and Central Coast), Regional Australia Institute and the University of New England.

With the assistance of Project Advisory Group members, Dr Cosgrave identified communities in north-western NSW as potential pilot sites based on their having health workforce shortages and a strong track-record of community collaboration. Dr Cosgrave worked with local



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governments in several communities to run a community workshop to explain the project, after which a number of communities submitted Expressions of Interest to be pilot sites.

Community members from the Glen Innes, Gwydir Shire and Narrabri LGAs (including local government, business and health service representatives) will now work closely with Dr Cosgrave by participating in series of co-design workshops and learning from each other to establish their own HWRC. It is expected that the three HWRC positions will be in place before the end of this year.

Other rural communities stand to benefit from the research project, as the **Attract, Connect, Stay** team will produce a suite of resources that others can utilise to create and sustain their own HWRC position. While working with the three NSW communities, the research team will be developing resources that are best suited to Australian rural communities. In 2022 the project will be extended into Victoria and potentially some other NSW sites to test the applicability of the resources developed for a broad range of rural communities.

"We've seen great success in other rural communities adopting this approach in strengthening health workforce. I'm looking forward to working closely with the Glen Innes, Gwydir Shire and Narrabri communities to support them to develop their own self-funded and locally managed Health Workforce Recruiter & Connector. I genuinely believe these positions are essential rural healthcare infrastructure and are a significant missing piece for effectively addressing rural health workforce shortages" said Dr Cosgrave.

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