

**16 August 2022**

## **16<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference calls for urgent action to bridge rural health care gaps**

Bridging social distance was the theme of the recently concluded 16<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, which focused on rural health innovation and collaboration to address the pressing issue of health care accessibility and disparities in health outcomes in rural and remote Australia.

Hosted by the National Rural Health Alliance (the Alliance) in Brisbane from 2-4 August 2022, the Conference saw over 700 delegates from Australia's health sector engaging in discussions on enabling better health services and facilities for people living in rural Australia.

Keynote speakers of the calibre of Stan Grant, Rabia Siddique, Dr. Keith Suter, Dr. Justin Yeung, and Christine Giles, inspired the audience with their powerful presentations.

The concurrent sessions dealt with a range of topics, from the impact of climate on health in rural communities, to challenges and solutions in the recruitment and retention of health care professionals, women's health and wellbeing, cultural sensitivity, health care innovation and digital health, rural health research, training pathways, and various models for improving access to health care in rural Australia.

Delegates had the opportunity to share their ideas at the Alliance exhibition booth where they provided feedback in response to a series of questions including their motivations for working rurally, ideas for improving rural health outcomes, and what they would recommend in terms of action for governments.

The Alliance Deputy Chair Dr. Stephen Gourley said the overarching theme of the feedback was that "rural and remote communities are not just smaller urban communities but require different models of care and funding".

"The Alliance has two key policy platforms: a new National Rural Health Strategy and the Rural Area Community Controlled Health Organisations (RACCHO) model," said the Alliance's outgoing CEO Dr. Gabrielle O'Kane at the conference. A [video on RACCHOs](#) was aired during her presentation.

"Local community leadership and co-design, block funding and secure models of employment are core components of the RACCHO model and key to improving access to multidisciplinary primary health care in rural areas. We urge policymakers to take action," she said.

She added: "It is important to link a new National Rural Health Strategy to an implementation plan with clear measures to evaluate its effectiveness."

With the conference wrap-up, Dr. O'Kane leaves the National Rural Health Alliance for retirement after a stint of three years.

Ends-

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