



SUPPORTING RURAL HEALTH STUDENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES IN THE COVID 19 CRISIS

26 March 2020 - Australia's vital University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) are committed to offering whatever assistance is required to support students and rural and remote communities throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

The 16 UDRHs are located in rural and remote areas in all states and the NT. They provide students in nursing and allied health with clinical placements to address health workforce shortages which exist in many centres outside capital cities. UDRHs are funded by the federal government through the Department of Health.

The peak body for UDRHs, the Australian Rural Health Education Network (ARHEN) said today that some UDRHs have cancelled students' clinical placements, while others are supporting students already on site to continue. Decisions are being made by each UDRH according to local conditions and requirements.

"The safety of students and communities is our priority. All government guidelines about social distancing and hygiene requirements will be strictly adhered to as UDRHs work through these issues," ARHEN Chair Prof Lisa Bourke said.

"Where placements are safe and effective, we are supporting these to continue, with adjustments to the scope of activities being undertaken according to local circumstances. We understand the particular importance of placements for final year students.

"Some UDRHs or their partner health services have cancelled clinical placements or are reconsidering locations. Where borders have been closing, some students have returned to their home state from the placement.

"Student accommodation has been identified as a point of risk and the likelihood that an interstate student may require isolation. UDRHs are addressing this, keeping in mind that accommodation in these locations may also be required for other clinicians who are also part of the COVID 19 response. Other university buildings are also being repurposed, eg to run clinics.

"There may also be opportunities to involve students who choose to participate through service learning approaches which can quickly add valuable capacity to local health workforces. Some students are keen to use their skills to assist and some rural and remote health services have indicated they will need this additional workforce," Lisa said.

UDRHs are also sharing resources and infrastructure that they have in rural and remote areas with local services to assist in response to COVID-19.

ARHEN is also participating in online forums about COVID 19 including:

- a primary health care update with Prof Michael Kidd, Principal Medical Adviser, DoH
- a meeting with key rural health education stakeholders convened by Universities Australia
- the Rural Health Roundtable convened by the Minister for Regional Health Mark Coulton, currently focused on COVID 19 responses.



“ARHEN will continue to liaise with DoH and do whatever it can to support students, rural communities and the government’s response to COVID 19,” Lisa said.

MEDIA CONTACT

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