



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

**Policy Portion 2004/1**

## **Wanted: Allied Health<sup>1</sup> Services in Country Areas**

The Alliance is concerned about the continuing shortage of allied health services in country areas. Despite increased activity at national, State and Territory level, rural and remote Australia is losing allied health positions and clinicians.

The Australian Government is funding the More Allied Health Services program through the Divisions of General Practice. It is also providing postgraduate scholarships for clinical health practitioners who are not nurses or doctors. Rural and remote allied health professional services are also provided through the Australian Government Regional Health Services Program. A recent meeting of the Australian Health Workforce Officers' Committee has produced a National Framework for the Health Workforce which acknowledges that the shortage of allied health professionals on the ground constitutes a significant gap. At the State and Territory levels, there is also some valuable leadership. A modest number of scholarships are available for allied health students from State and Territory Governments, and a number of jurisdictions now have a Principal Advisor of Allied Health Services.

Despite these encouraging signs, the Alliance is still receiving reports of lost positions and unfilled vacancies. This suggests that - whatever the situation at State and national levels - allied health practitioners and the services they provide are not receiving sufficient priority from Area Health Services and/or local communities. Some physiotherapy and dietetics services, for instance, have been cut. When health authorities find it difficult to fill an allied health vacancy, they sometimes use this as the reason to abolish the position. Correspondents of the Alliance claim that the situation is so serious that rural areas are losing some of their experienced allied health clinicians.

This situation has adverse consequences for patients, the existing workforce and for the training placements of new allied health practitioners.

### **Recommendation:**

The Alliance calls on State and Territory Governments, through their Area Health Services and public hospitals, to increase the priority given to allied health positions in rural and remote areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The Alliance uses the term 'allied health' to refer to health professions other than nursing and midwifery, medicine, dentistry and community pharmacy.