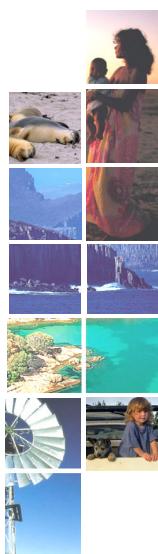


Ensuring access to pharmacy services in rural Australia

Fiona Thornberry, Lance Emerson, The Pharmacy Guild of Australia

ABSTRACT

The Rural and Remote Pharmacy Workforce Development Program (RRPWDP) was established in 1999 to maintain and enhance pharmacy services in rural and remote Australia. The program was established in recognition of the fact that there is a serious maldistribution of pharmacists in rural and remote areas. The aim of the RRPWDP is to implement strategies to strengthen and support the rural and remote pharmacy workforce. Modelled on successful tools for improving recruitment and retention of other health professionals in rural and remote areas of Australia and taking into account the unique characteristics of the pharmacy profession, the RRPWDP consists of interventions on a variety of levels. The Program also draws upon the strategies that have underpinned many successful international programs that aim to improve recruitment and retention of health professionals in rural and remote areas.



WHY IS ACCESS SO IMPORTANT?

- **ACCESSIBILITY** – Pharmacies are one of the most accessible health services – on average, each man, woman and child visits a community pharmacy 14 times each year.
- **TRUST** – Pharmacists are the 2nd most trusted health professional in Australia (Morgan Poll).
- **ESSENTIAL SERVICES** – Access to medication, pharmacist advice, professional services (such as Home Medicines Reviews, nursing home visitations), health/medical products, etc.

IS ACCESS TO PHARMACY SERVICES COMPROMISED BECAUSE OF RURAL PHARMACIST SHORTAGE?

- 5,000 pharmacies across Australia.
- 3,721 people per pharmacy in Urban areas.
- 3,987 people per pharmacy in Rural areas.
- Shortage in rural areas has been identified by AIHW, the Commonwealth Government, the Pharmacy Profession, etc.



WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE SHORTAGE?

- Pharmacy Guild of Australia – negotiates 5 year agreements with Federal Government on a range of pharmacy issues.
- Current (3rd) agreement commenced in May 2000.
- Rural issues are a significant feature of the 3rd Agreement.

THE RURAL PHARMACY PACKAGE

Consists of four main elements:

- the Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance (increases with remoteness)
- the Start-up and Succession Allowances (to open new pharmacies and ensure existing ones don't close)
- an allowance to enable pharmacists to provide professional services to remote Aboriginal Medical Services
- the Rural and Remote Pharmacy Workforce Development Program.

THE RURAL AND REMOTE PHARMACIST WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

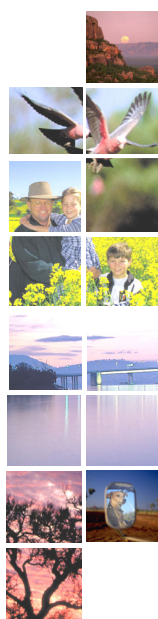
- Commenced in 1999 as a pilot but through 3rd Guild/Government Agreement funded as full program.
- Managed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.
- Overseen by the main pharmacy organisations (Guild/Pharmaceutical Society, Australian Society Hospital Pharmacists etc).
- Comprised of at least 12 sub-programs.

Emergency Locum Service

- Supports pharmacists in rural and remote areas through direct access to locums in emergency situations such as illness, bereavement, or family emergencies.
- Telephone access to the service is available 24hrs a day, for a maximum of 7 days.
- Commenced operation in February 2002.

Continuing Professional Education Development Scholarship Scheme

- Provides financial support to encourage and enable pharmacists practicing in rural and remote communities.
- To date, a total of 197 Scholarships have been provided to rural pharmacists.



Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme

- Exposing students to positive rural health practice is an effective strategy for increasing the recruitment and retention of health professional in rural areas.
- There are a total of 12 scholarships offered annually, with a value of \$6,000 per annum per student.
- To date there have been 43 scholarships awarded.

Rural Placement (Internship) Scholarship Scheme for students

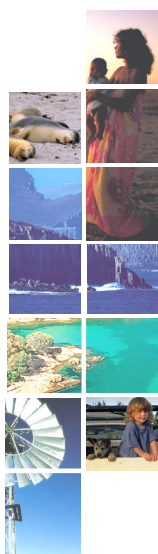
- In Australia pharmacy students are required to undertake placements or “internships” in community and/or hospital pharmacy practice as part of their undergraduate course.
- The Scholarships provide assistance with travel and accommodation costs.
- The Scheme has increased the number of students undertaking placements in rural areas.
- There were over 1,000 rural placements in 2002.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme

- To encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake studies in Pharmacy at University.
- A total of 3 scholarships valued at \$15,000 per annum for a maximum of four years is offered annually.
- To date, 5 scholarships have been awarded.

Rural and Remote Pharmacy Infrastructure Grant Scheme

- Grants scheme designed to support community pharmacy in the development of innovative strategies to enhance and improve access to pharmacy services for Australians in rural and remote communities.
- The primary aim of RRPIGS is to:
 - improve the recruitment and retention rates of pharmacists in rural and remote locations
 - improve the delivery of pharmacy services to rural and remote communities.



Pharmacist academics at University Departments of Rural Health

- To enable part time pharmacist academic positions at University Departments of Rural Health.
- The objectives of the scheme are to:
 - raise the profile of rural pharmacy
 - provide academic and mentoring support to students on internship placements
 - provide advisory and mentoring support to pharmacists to increase the numbers of trained preceptors
 - ensure graduates have an awareness of rural issues.

Rural Pharmacy newsletter

- *Rural Pharmacy* is a newsletter of information, news and networking for Australia's rural and remote pharmacists. The newsletter is produced on a biannual basis and distributed to over 4,000 readers nationally.

Rural Pharmacy Promotion Campaign

- Television campaign aimed at promoting pharmacy as a career option to rural students, improving the recruitment of pharmacists in rural areas, and informing pharmacists of the rural measures funded through the Third Government Community Pharmacy Agreement.

CONCLUSION

- Ninety per cent reduction in rural pharmacy closures since program commencement in May 2000.
- Rural pharmacy practice is becoming more attractive to graduates.
- Change in culture in pharmacy – owning a rural pharmacy no longer like being sent to Siberia.
- The Guild, PSA and SHPA (the profession) will continue to research issues, develop solutions, and seek funding to implement and maintain successful programs aimed at ensuring access to pharmacy services in rural Australia.

