



## MEDIA RELEASE

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Good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

### **Lessons must be learned from tragedy at Fregon**

The Australian health sector and the wider community need to understand and learn from the tragedy that took place in Fregon last week.

While it is true that personal violence can be experienced anywhere, the working conditions of health professionals in small remote communities must be understood and accommodated by those who employ them.

Geri Malone, Chairperson of the NRHA and herself experienced in remote practice, said that health professionals in remote and isolated practice are more vulnerable due to the very nature of the places in which they practise. Processes need to be in place to support them to work safely in remote communities, especially if they are working alone or in very small teams.

"The most important thing to do immediately is to respect the privacy of Gayle Woodford's family," Ms Malone said. "We must also be considerate of the impact on her colleagues and the community of Fregon."

"Occupational violence against health workers is sadly nothing new and is not restricted to rural and remote areas," Ms Malone said.

However in sparsely settled areas, violent incidents take on quite different characteristics and proportions. The great majority of remote area nurses are women and they play an essential role in primary care and emergencies in the communities where they live and work.

"This tragic event has impacted enormously on all Remote Area Nurses and other health workers who serve in similar contexts," Ms Malone said. "The time must be taken to focus on how we address this issue."

Providing basic services to remote communities is a challenge for all governments and the private sector. But no costs can be spared, no corners cut, if health professionals are to deliver appropriate and essential care in a setting that is safe for them and their patients. The whole health sector has responsibility for this.

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*The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia's peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health. Its vision is good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.*