



Joint Communiqué

Bilateral Regional Health Forum

9 December 2022, Tamworth NSW

A bilateral Regional Health Forum, co-chaired by the Australian Government's Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, the Hon Emma McBride MP, and the New South Wales Minister for Regional Health, Mental Health and Minister for Women, the Hon Bronnie Taylor, MLC discussed joint interests in rural and regional primary care, mental health and suicide prevention and aged care in NSW.

Assistant Minister McBride emphasised the Australian Government's commitment to improve the distribution of the health workforce across regional, rural, and remote areas and the \$146 million investment in more doctors and allied health practitioners in regional and rural Australia. Minister Taylor outlined the workforce pressures that the system is facing due to the shortages of general practitioners and the initiatives underway to reduce this pressure on the system.

Access to sustainable high quality health care in rural areas has been a longstanding challenge. The Forum canvassed current and future opportunities for innovative and collaborative approaches to rural health in NSW, progressing the implementation of the National Medical Workforce Strategy, and growing the rural generalist allied health and nursing workforces.

It was agreed that the five innovative trials of different approaches to primary care provision in rural NSW offered strong potential for further collaboration and expansion into other areas of NSW. Further, discussions continued on expansion of the Murrumbidgee single-employer model into a number of local health districts in NSW, with NSW to bring back to the Commonwealth areas for consideration.

It was recognised that the high cost of locum rates is distorting regional health service delivery and that NSW would continue to lead a discussion at future Health Ministers meetings on potential state and territory reforms.

Discussions supported placements across other key frontline health roles, drawing on experience with the NSW Government's Assistants In Medicine (AIM) program. There was reaffirmed support for growing the nurse practitioner model and removing impediments to the delivery of appropriate clinical care.

Discussions also highlighted the ongoing implementation of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and agreed initiatives in the associated Commonwealth - NSW bilateral schedule on mental health and suicide prevention. There was focus on aligning both Government's health and wellbeing responses to disasters as well as youth mental health and wellbeing. Further, both Governments recognised the need to build upon Aftercare services and community led resilience responses.

As well, the Forum noted that jointly addressing recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety will benefit aged care residents and those who care for them. Underpinning these key areas, improving access to health care services for First

Nations communities and addressing health inequities is a priority for both governments. Minister Taylor raised the pressures that smaller aged-care facilities are facing, the incoming reforms and the affect it may have on NSW health facilities. Assistant Minister McBride agreed with the need to continue working collaboratively to improve aged care.

Ministers committed to continuing dialogue on these priority areas with the next Bilateral Regional Health Forum to be held in mid-2023.