

Joint Communiqué

Bilateral Regional Health Forum

25 September 2025

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 Health and Minister for Regional Health, the Hon Ryan Park MP, discussed shared objectives in rural, regional and remote health in NSW.

The Forum, held in Cootamundra, included discussion of current initiatives and opportunities for further collaboration in primary care and aged care, mental health and suicide prevention, and rural generalism in NSW.

Access to primary care in regional, rural and remote areas in NSW has been a longstanding challenge. The Forum discussed learnings from current initiatives, including health workforce training in place and Commonwealth Supported Places outside major cities. The Forum also considered opportunities for the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) and NSW Health to engage local communities in reform of funding for primary care in thin and failed markets.

Reform is underway in the Multi-Purpose Service Program (MPSP) to make sure this program remains sustainable and transitions with the rest of the aged care sector to a new person-centred, rights-based aged care system under the *Aged Care Act 2024*. The Forum discussed the important role of the MPSP funding model review in considering the costs of providing high quality aged care within an integrated health and aged care setting in rural and remote locations, as well as capital investment challenges.

There was recognition of the value of Rural Generalists, and consideration given to how NSW Health and the DHDA can work together to make Rural Generalist roles more attractive and competitive compared to other medical specialties. The Forum discussed opportunities for strengthened coordination in workforce planning to maximise the uptake of funded training positions and secure a sustainable Rural Generalist workforce.

The Forum recognised that mental ill health and suicide disproportionately impact people living in rural, regional and remote areas. The Forum discussed the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and the rolling out of support services in rural, regional and remote communities. It was agreed that the DHDA would work with NSW Health as more services continue to be established to make sure they are accessible and best meet the needs of rural communities across New South Wales.

Ministers committed to continuing dialogue on these priority areas and agreed that the next Bilateral Regional Health Forum would be held in the second half of 2027.