

8 March 2024

## Doctors call for child care solution to help include women in rural medical workplaces

International Women's Day – 8 March 24

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In their Pre-Budget Submission, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) have proposed that child care centres on the grounds of smaller rural hospitals be funded to help allow parents who are doctors get back into the workplace.



RDAA President Dr RT Lewandowski said that getting new parents, particularly women, back into the workplace as soon as they are ready was an important issue for RDAA.

“In many rural communities, professional parents who want to return to work simply can’t, because they do not have access to child care,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“Getting doctors who are new parents back to work is not only necessary for their family, but also for the continuation of the essential health services they provide to the community.

“Rural health services are often operating with or close to the minimum number of clinicians needed to maintain the service. If a doctor, who is a GP anaesthetist for example, is unable to return to work – even if they want to – then the loss of their role limits patient access to essential GP care and can also impact services at the hospital. Losing a clinician out of the hospital roster can ultimately result in the closure of the services that rely on them; in the case of a GP anaesthetist it could affect birthing, surgery and emergency care.

“This issue has been raised by RDAA’s Female Doctors Group over many years and it is close to the heart for so many of our members. RDAA is dedicated to improving gender equality and inclusion in rural medical workplaces. Women make up more than half of all new medical graduates in Australia, so making sure that they are equally able to participate in rural workplaces is essential.

“In many rural communities there is no child care available. Too often doctors, particularly female doctors who have had a baby, are desperate to return to work, but simply can’t get a viable solution to their childcare needs,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“Many female doctors are the primary wage earner in their household. With no employer provided maternity leave available for female GPs or female Rural Generalists in the current system\*, the lack

of local child care often leads to them relocating to larger centres that have greater access to child care, enabling them to re-enter the workforce.”

In their Pre-Budget Submission RDAA proposed an initial 10 site program to establish rural childcare centres in the grounds of rural or remote hospitals with health care workers (state and privately employed) or other critical community workers such as police given priority access to childcare places.

“Under our proposal, State hospital services provide the land on site for construction, the Commonwealth allocates funds for construction, and ongoing operational costs would be the responsibility of the service management,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“There are similar child care centres already established in metropolitan hospitals, and in the grounds of Parliament House itself. We believe that if this is a viable solution for our politicians and city-based health professionals, then extending this to rural health care workers is a necessary step.

“These centres would have additional benefits as they would providing further local employment opportunities for childcare workers, as well as supporting a broader economic benefit by enabling partners of health professionals to have greater employment opportunities; something which is currently often restricted by a lack of access to childcare.

“We hope that the Albanese Government is interested in exploring this option further as part of a suite of measures suggested by RDAA to further support the provision of health care to rural Australians.”

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\* From 1 July 2023, higher income earning women became eligible for the Government’s Paid Parental Scheme, which pays 20 weeks at the minimum wage rate. The change of assessment from the mother’s income to household income was made as a result of advocacy by RDAA.

### [RDAA’s Pre-Budget Submission](#)

A high resolution photo of Dr RT Lewandowski is [available here](#).

#### **Available for interview:**

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