

Media release
11 May 2022

Health workforce shortage and ‘greening’ rural practice among key topics at rural doctor conference

Victorian Rural Health Conference 2022
This weekend (13-15 May), Bendigo
<https://www.rdaa.com.au/vrhc22>

Media note – Victorian Health Minister and Shadow Health Minister to attend

The ongoing critical shortage of rural doctors, nurses and other health professionals in Victoria, continuing ambulance ramping at Victorian rural hospitals, and long-term health workforce strategies will be key issues for discussion at the peak annual conference for Victoria’s rural doctors, to be held this weekend at Bendigo.

But the conference will also look at innovation, with strategies to make rural general practice more environmentally-friendly certain to be a popular session.

Starting this Friday (13 May), this will be the first time that the Victorian Rural Health Conference has been held since 2019 due to the COVID pandemic.

More than 130 rural Victorian doctors and other stakeholders will attend the event.

“This year’s conference is a celebration of everything we’ve wanted to do in Victoria over the past three years,” **President of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV), Dr Rob Phair, said.**

“Responding to COVID has taken a massive effort on the part of doctors, nurses and other health professionals right across the world...including rural Victoria. And we’re not done yet.

“Now is the time for Victoria’s rural doctors and health services to regroup, and for the Victorian Government to look to build a stronger rural health workforce for the future – our conference will have a strong focus on this.

“We have been excited to see the investment in rural healthcare committed to by the Coalition and Labor at the federal level, and want to see the Victorian Government actively working to complement these initiatives.

“In the lead-up to the Victorian State Election later this year, the State Government and Opposition will need to do all they can to show Victorians they are concerned about health workforce shortages in rural Victoria and continuing ambulance ramping at our rural hospitals, and how they will fix this.”

The conference will feature addresses by the:

- **Victorian Health Minister, Martin Foley MP**
- **Victorian Shadow Health Minister, Georgie Crozier MP**
- **National Rural Health Commissioner, Adjunct Professor Ruth Stewart**

Delegates will also hear about innovative responses to the COVID pandemic, including from:

- **Victorian anaesthetist and intensive care physician, Professor Forbes McGain**, who, together with a University of Melbourne engineering team, designed the McMonty Medihood in the early part of the pandemic to provide an easy-to-install solution for hospitals in helping to protect health professionals while treating potentially COVID positive patients.
- **Dr Kirby White, a Bendigo GP** who was behind the ‘Gowns for Doctors’ initiative to help meet demand for protective gowns for doctors during the pandemic. For her efforts, Kirby was named Victoria’s ‘Local Hero’ and was nominated for the 2021 Australian of the Year Awards, and Mattel even created a ‘Dr Kirby White’ Barbie doll to honour her efforts.



Other key topics at the conference include:

- Greening your practice – how to make general practices more environmentally-friendly
- Rural birthing services
- Women in rural health
- Looking beyond COVID: what have we learnt and where to from here?
- Doctors' health & wellbeing
- Victorian Rural Generalist Program – an update
- Diverse gender & sexuality health

Key policy issues for discussion at the conference will include the need for:

- **Industrial reforms and better supports for rural doctors in Victoria** – particularly the delivery of a fairer statewide award that better supports those rural GPs who provide essential services as Visiting Medical Officers (VMOs) at their local hospitals in country Victoria.
- **The proper funding of Urgent Care Centres** so that rural patients and health services aren't left out of pocket.
- **Better recognition and reward for after-hours and advanced clinical care** provided by rural doctors in Victoria, for example in Urgent Care Centres.
- **Measures to support rural birthing services in country Victoria**, and to grow rural midwife and GP obstetrician capacity, with a strong focus on collaborative care models.

Media are very welcome to attend the conference. Please advise of your attendance in advance via the media contacts below.

The full conference program can be [found here](#).

A high resolution photo of Dr Rob Phair is [available here](#).

Available for interview

RDAV President, Dr Rob Phair
RDAA CEO, Peta Rutherford

Media contacts

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