

Introduction to Rural Health Program

The Institute of Rural Clinical Services and Teaching (NSW Health) recently provided funding for the CRRMH to conduct a scoping study on the need for an inter-professional Rural and Remote Clinicians Program (Introduction to Rural Health). This program would be designed to assist newly appointed clinicians with their transition to rural and remote clinical practice in NSW.

The scoping study was undertaken by Janie Dade-Smith and involved surveying 126 clinicians from a range of Health disciplines and several Workforce Directors from three rural Area Health Services. Findings clearly indicated that 74% of respondents had received an orientation to their current position but this was largely an induction into their position, rather than an orientation to rural and remote practice. Furthermore, 93% of respondents agreed that there is a need for a rural and remote clinician's program and 64% indicated that they would be reasonably or extremely interested in participating in such a program.

The survey also identified barriers that might impact on respondent's capacity to undertake a transition program to rural and remote practice. The common themes cited included time for educational release, funding, resources, management support and the demands of clinical work. In addition, the study identified several health service models that are currently being implemented in rural areas to enhance recruitment and retention of health professionals, including the Outreach Allied Health Service Model in North West Queensland and the Central Australian Pathways to Professional Practice Program.

In 2008, the CRRMH will conduct a state-wide pilot of the Introduction to Rural Mental Health Practice Program that also aims to enhance support for and retention of rural and remote clinicians. This pilot has been funded by the Institute of Rural Clinical Services and Teaching and the CRRMH greatly values the partnership we have developed in terms of identifying the educational needs of health workers commencing employment in rural and remote locations. Overall, the scoping study confirms that both clinicians and employers recognise the value in undertaking educational programs that enhance rural career development and may ultimately lead to improved retention of health professionals in rural and remote areas.