

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 30 & 31 May and 1 June 2012

**Question:** E12-031

**OUTCOME 12:** Health Workforce Capacity

**Topic:** Continuing Education in Rural and Remote Areas

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Number of pages:** 2

**Senator:** Senator Boyce

**Question:**

There are limited professional educational development opportunities in rural and remote areas. What steps is the government taking to deliver a robust and well resourced continuing education system for health providers working in isolation?

**Answer:**

The Government is committed to providing health professionals working in rural and remote areas the opportunity to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) through the provision of programs such as:

*The National Rural Locum Program (NRLP)*

- The NRLP supports rural doctors, specialist and GP obstetricians, anaesthetists and allied health professionals to take leave from their workplace to undertake education and training.

*Nursing and Allied Health Rural Locum Scheme (NAHRLS)*

- The NARHLS enables nurses and allied health professionals in rural areas to take leave to complete CPD training and allows organisations to back-fill their positions for up to 14 days.

*Diagnostic Imaging - Enhancing Rural and Remote Workforce (DI-ERRWS) Scheme*

- The DI-ERRWS provides postgraduate and professional development year scholarships to support the rural diagnostic imaging workforce.

*The Rural Health Continuing Education (RHCE)*

- The RHCE delivers CPD and support to health professionals working in rural and remote areas of Australia. It is delivered through three separate funding streams.  
**Stream 1:** Provides funding through the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges to medical specialist colleges to develop and deliver continuing professional education for medical specialists.

**Stream 2:** Provides funding to the National Rural Health Alliance to develop and deliver CPD, training and support for eligible allied health providers, nurses, general practitioners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers in rural and remote areas of Australia.

**Stream 3:** Provides funding to the Rural Health Education Foundation for a dedicated digital Rural Health Channel to assist rural and remote health professionals to undertake CPD. The Foundation produces and broadcasts accredited education material through this Channel on the Aurora Digital satellite system via DVD and video, web streaming and 'pod casts'. In 2011-12, the Foundation received one off funding to upgrade analogue set top boxes with digital ready set-top boxes at 610 satellite reception sites so that regional, rural and remote health professionals can receive as well as record broadcasts over the new upgraded digital service.

*The Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship and Support Scheme (NAHSSS)*

- The NAHSSS provides scholarships to nursing and allied health students and professionals for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, CPD training and clinical placements. The nursing component of NAHSSS provides scholarships for re-entry courses so that nurses can be retrained if they want to return to nursing.
- The nursing component is open to applicants across Australia, regardless of location. However, priority is given through ranking criteria for any undergraduate nursing and midwifery student who needs to relocate in order to study.
- To be eligible for an undergraduate scholarship under the allied health component, applicants must have spent a total of 5 consecutive or 8 cumulative years in a rural location from the age of 5. For the remaining allied scholarships, priority is given through the ranking criteria for rural and remote students.

The Government will be reviewing of all its health workforce programs in 2012-13 to ensure that it is targeting support (including professional development opportunities) to the areas where it is needed most. Through this review, the Government will examine support for the rural and remote health workforce, and which incentives will make the greatest difference to rural communities in the future.