

SARRAH

Services for Australian
Rural and Remote Allied Health

Media Release

15 October 2020

ATTRACT, CONNECT, STAY RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE COORDINATOR PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (**SARRAH**) has successfully secured **\$140,179** funding for the **Attract, Connect, Stay** Project through the Enhancing Country Health Outcomes (ECHO) grant program managed by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). This 2-year project aims to improve health outcomes for people living in small rural communities (pop. less than 10,000) in NSW and Victoria. The project will be led by SARRAH and **Dr Cath Cosgrave** (Cath Cosgrave Consulting) with the support of an expert research team in rural health workforce including Dr Christina Malatzky (Queensland University of Technology), Dr Susan Waller (Monash University) and Dr Rosalie Boyce (Barwon Health, South West Healthcare) as well as partner organisations NSW Rural Doctors Network, NSW Regional Health Partners, and New England Institute Healthcare Research, University of New England and various rural health services. All stakeholders are strongly committed to supporting rural communities to thrive-in-place and understand the importance of a sustainable rural health workforce and are making significant in-kind contribution to the project (total budget \$282,249). The stakeholders are grateful to FRRR for enabling this important work, and for the support they provide to others in demonstrating what is possible in communities, when they have a say in what can and will work for them.

The **Attract, Connect, Stay** Project aims to address persistent workforce shortages by using a whole of community approach. It will initially be implemented in four rural NSW towns to address the need for newcomer health professionals to feel settled in, become socially connected, and experience a sense of belonging-in-place: an essential condition for retention.

The project will establish community-funded and managed Rural Health Workforce Coordinators (RHWC) in each site to attract and support health professionals. The **Attract, Connect, Stay** Project is based on a successful model developed in Marathon, Ontario, Canada. The translation of this model into the rural Australian context will benefit not just the communities involved in the project but develop tools and resources that can be applied more broadly. Evaluation is a key component of the project to support the transferability to the other sites as well as the sustainability of RHWC positions. The project's evaluation will be led by SARRAH's Research Fellow Dr Anna Moran.

The **Attract, Connect, Stay** Project will be led by Dr Cath Cosgrave; a recognised expert in rural health workforce who has investigated the importance of preconditions for the retention of rural health professionals under the domain of 'community and place'. Dr Cosgrave identified the RHWC model and its potential for replicability for rural Australia during a 2-month trip to Canada in 2019 as part of her Churchill Fellowship awarded to investigate new approaches to strengthen social connection of newly-arrived rural health workers.

"Projects such as **Attract, Connect, Stay** are vital", said SARRAH CEO, Cath Maloney. "They are invaluable if Governments are looking for practical approaches and investments to address persistent and serious gaps in Australia's health system.

"The evidence of those gaps is overwhelming and clear: people in rural and remote Australia experience, on average, much higher rates of chronic disease, avoidable illness, and are far more likely to be hospitalised in circumstances where earlier access to the right care could have prevented it", said Cath Maloney. "People living in rural and remote areas find it much harder to access allied health professional (AHP) services: they can be thin on the ground or not there at all."

The **Attract, Connect, Stay** Project will add to the growing body of evidence, including the report to Government in June 2020 by the previous National Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, *Improvement of Access, Quality and Distribution of Allied Health Services in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia*, demonstrating how the benefits of Australia's world class health system can be made accessible to all Australians.

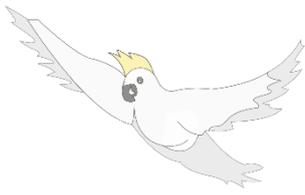
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SARRAH is the peak body representing rural and remote allied health professionals (AHPs) working in public, private and/or community settings. SARRAH advocates on behalf of rural and remote Australian communities. SARRAH maintains that every Australian should have access to health services wherever they live, and the allied health services are fundamental to the well-being of all Australians.

SARRAH represents 27 different allied health professions, including: Audiology; Medical Imaging; Paramedics; Chinese Medicine; Nuclear Medicine; Pharmacy; Chiropractic; Radiation Therapy; Physiotherapy; Dental and Oral Health; Health Promotion; Podiatry; Dentistry; Occupational Therapy; Prosthetics; Dietetics and Nutrition; Optometry; Psychology; Diabetes Education; Orthoptics; Speech Pathology; Exercise Physiology; Orthotics; Social Work; Genetic Counselling; Osteopathy; Sonography

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