

VHA State Election Platform 2022

Addressing the rural health gap

Almost a quarter of Victorians live in rural and regional Victoria.

Living in rural and regional areas comes with great benefits, like increased community involvement and cohesiveness, a stronger sense of community, better work-life balance, and higher rates of home ownership. These social indicators are associated with good mental and physical health.

However, according to other health indicators, rural Victorians are also more likely to experience poorer health outcomes than metropolitan Victorians.

Comprehensive healthcare is essential to disease prevention, early intervention, and chronic disease management – and rural Victorians deserve the same level of access to high-quality care as Victorians living in metropolitan Melbourne or a regional hub.

The operational challenges that rural health services face are compounded by social, economic and geographic disadvantage, adding to the disparity in health outcomes for rural Victorians.

Rural health services are doing the best they can with the resources they have to deliver high-quality care to their local communities. But they need more support – that’s why the VHA is calling on the government to level the playing field.

3x 

Australian rural communities are three times more likely to report their access to healthcare as ‘poor’ and, on average, utilise [Medicare 40% less](#) than those in metropolitan areas.

 
↓3
years

In Victoria, people living outside of Greater Melbourne experience a reduced average life expectancy of [three years](#) compared to their metropolitan counterparts.



What can government do to support rural health services?

The VHA is seeking nine commitments from the next State Government to support public health and community health services across Victoria. These are:



WORKFORCE

- Enable our workforce to deliver more care
- Flexibility for a modern health workforce
- Recruit and retain healthcare workers for better care



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Maintain our hospital and community health facilities
- Upgrade our physical and digital infrastructure
- A clear and transparent infrastructure roadmap



FUNDING MODELS

- Funding reform to keep Victorians healthy and out of hospital
- Keep health funding above inflation
- A No Gap Guarantee for Urgent Care Centres

These commitments have been developed through extensive engagement with VHA members – for rural health services, the VHA's quarterly [Rural Regional Roundtable](#) was a key forum to gather and test priority policies.

All nine of our election asks are relevant to rural health services and the communities they serve, with three that have a particularly strong rural focus.

A No Gap Guarantee for Urgent Care Centres



We want the next Victorian State Government to fully fund rural Urgent Care Centres so that no Victorian will have to pay for emergency care.

Urgent Care Centres are a vital health resource, delivering urgent and emergency care to rural communities. But there is often an out-of-pocket expense attached.

Currently, if a Victorian presents to an Urgent Care Centre, they may have to pay a Medicare fee – yet if they were in a regional hub or metropolitan area, they could attend an emergency department for free.

Rural Victorians deserve equitable access to urgent care

We have heard consumer feedback of people having to make the difficult decision to not visit an urgent care centre when they or their children needed medical attention, because they couldn't afford to pay the gap fee.

Victorians in rural and regional areas should not be punished for not being near an emergency department – access to emergency care should be equal, no matter where you live.

Enable our workforce to deliver more care



We want the next Victorian State Government to increase and expand Victoria’s ‘full scope’ workforce programs to ensure clinical skills and expertise are used in the most effective way.

We need to address workforce shortages by using staff to the best of their abilities; this is often called working to ‘full scope of practice’ – working to the full extent of the profession’s recognised skill base and regulatory guidelines.

For example, Rural and Isolated Practice Registered Nurses (RIPRNs) can provide extra clinical care in communities facing GP shortages. Through further training, RIPRNs can deliver and dispense medicines and care that other nurses can’t – but more nurses could deliver these roles if they were supported.

Roles with expanded responsibilities are already vital for care across Victoria, but they are limited by red tape, regulations, and a disjointed approach. If used systemically, these types of roles will benefit services and patients in rural and regional Victoria.

We need the government to recognise the challenges rural health services face, and the opportunities that flexible workforce models, such as the use of RIPRNs, represent.

Our members tell us that current state-wide workforce models do not support the rural and regional health service environment

Rural health services are facing chronic and unique workforce challenges, which are exacerbated by geographical location and scale of service. Challenges include housing availability, inflexible workforce models, and competitive remuneration, which create added complexity to recruitment and retention of staff.

Maintain our hospital and community health facilities



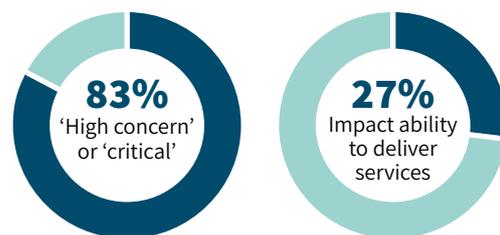
We want the next Victorian State Government to create a Health Infrastructure Maintenance Fund to provide expert support, maintenance, and regulatory compliance.

Ensuring the basic running of our facilities is critical to the delivery of healthcare. While our health and community health services are funded to provide healthcare, they rely heavily on State Government support for their infrastructure expenses.

While the Victorian Government dedicated \$2.5 billion to health infrastructure in the last Budget, only \$55 million was dedicated to maintaining the current asset base. Health services tell us they are having to use money intended for upgrades just to meet basic compliance requirements.

The state of our rural health infrastructure is of critical concern

83% of rural and regional health service members described the state of their infrastructure as ‘high concern’ or ‘critical’ – 27% of which reported that their infrastructure needs often impact their ability to deliver services.



Without these commitments from government, rural health services will continue to be disproportionately affected by workforce shortages, ageing infrastructure and inadequate funding – with poorer health outcomes for local communities.

If you care about the health of your community, **#VoteForHealth**

If you are concerned about access to quality healthcare in your local area, take action to support your local health service ahead of the Victorian election 2022.



Find out what the major parties are saying about health by following our election commitment tracker <https://padlet.com/VHA2022/voteforhealth>



Ask your local MP what they are doing to improve access to health services in your area



Find out which local candidates are committed to improving the quality of local health services



Write to your local MP to let them know that health is important to you (we've created [this handy resource](#) to guide you)



Read the VHA's full State election platform at www.vha.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/agenda-2022/

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