



S·A·R·R·A·H

Services for Australian
Rural and Remote Allied Health

**Submission to the National Commission of
Audit**

**Against elements of the Terms of
Reference**

November 2013

INTRODUCTION

Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH), welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the terms of reference of the National Audit of Commission.

SARRAH is nationally recognised as a peak body representing rural and remote allied health professionals working in both the public and private sector.

SARRAH's representation comes from a range of allied health professions including but not limited to: Audiology, Dietetics, Exercise Physiology, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Oral Health, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Psychology, Social Work and Speech Pathology.

These allied health professionals provide a range of clinical and health education services to individuals who live in rural and remote communities. Allied health professionals are critical in the management of their clients' health needs, particularly in relation to chronic disease and complex care needs.

Allied health services are highly valued by doctors and nurses in the bush, as without allied health providers it is not possible for other health professionals to provide the multi-disciplinary care that is needed to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, rehabilitation and long-term care of patients.

SUBMISSION

SARRAH supports the Commission's review and has focussed this submission on the activities of the Commonwealth government to:

- Identify areas or programs where the Commonwealth involvement is inappropriate, no longer needed, or blurs lines of accountability.

SARRAH's comments relate specifically to the Commonwealth Government's health programs.

A review of Australian Government health workforce programs was announced as part of the 2012-13 Federal Budget. The Review was led by independent chair Jennifer Mason – entitled the Mason Review of Australian Government Health Workforce Programs.

The Review focused on analysing the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of programs to ensure that they remained appropriate for Australian communities having access to a highly qualified health workforce now and into the future.

The Review made over 87 recommendations covering Commonwealth programs that targeted the medical, dental, allied health, nursing and midwifery and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforces.

Two key recommendations were accepted by the previous Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, which included:

- Developing an integrated rural training pathway for medicine (and possible extension to nursing and allied health); and

- Reforming the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas and District Workforce Shortage classification systems for application to health workforce programs.

SARRAH strongly recommends that the remaining Review recommendations be implemented in relation to programs for current and future allied health professionals wishing to practise in rural and remote Australia.

CONCLUSION

Funding and implementing a range of strategies to assist in the recruitment and retention of an adequate allied health workforce in rural and remote Australia is critical in enhancing the health and well-being of people residing in these settings.

Enhancing the provision of such services would not only reduce the pain and suffering of people living in rural and remote communities, but also reduce the rate of unnecessary hospitalisations, resulting in significant savings to the health budget.

SARRAH, as the peak body representing allied health professionals delivering health services to people residing in rural and remote communities across Australia, is well positioned to work with Governments and other stakeholders to address the issues raised in this submission.