

MEDIA RELEASE



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Rural Health Workforce in Crisis

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) supports a group of South Gippsland doctors which last night announced they will cease providing emergency and after-hours services at Wonthaggi Hospital due to their workload being a health risk to doctors and potentially unsafe for the community.

RDAA is extremely concerned by this and other recent events, which again highlight the desperate health workforce shortages affecting rural Australia.

Wonthaggi Hospital services 27,000 local residents however this population can be doubled or tripled by tourists on weekends and public holidays.

RDAA President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, said: "Local GPs attending Wonthaggi Hospital's Urgent Care Centre have been working 16-hour shifts and there was unanimous support for the action of the Wonthaggi doctors in deciding not to continue to provide care that may lead to harm to the community and themselves".

The doctors have given the hospital six months notice, effective October 17, of their withdrawal of the service.

RDAA supports the doctors' call for a funded emergency department at Wonthaggi to service the Bass Coast Shire (Wonthaggi and Phillip Island).

Previous government-funded studies have supported this position, yet doctors are unaware of measures in place to deal with future emergency service provision and present staff shortfalls.

Dr Rischbieth said: "Rural Australia's healthcare workforce crisis is not confined to the recruitment of doctors and neither is it confined to the provision of emergency services.

"RDAA is aware of many examples of hospitals struggling to recruit theatre staff, nurses, midwives, and mental health professionals and workforce shortages have been a major factor behind the closure of more than half of rural Australia's maternity services during the past decade.

“Worsening workforce pressures throughout rural Australia have in recent months seen obstetric services threatened in NSW, South Australian and Queensland communities, and led to the recent cessation of obstetrics services in Karratha, Western Australia.

“It is completely unacceptable for rural communities to continue to see women with no risk factors being forced to travel away from their family, their town, their usual GP obstetricians, midwives and other members of the local healthcare team to receive maternity healthcare because of inadequate recognition and remuneration of the rural workforce.”

Available for comment:

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