

28 November 2023

Medical Board of Australia

Email: [medboardconsultation@ahpra.gov.au](mailto:medboardconsultation@ahpra.gov.au)

Dear Medical Board of Australia

### Consultation on the recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine

Alpine Health wishes to express support for the proposal before the Board for Rural Generalist Medicine to be recognised as a new field of sub-specialty practice within the specialty of General Practice.

Alpine Health is a Multi-purpose Rural Health Service which provides a broad range of health and community services across the Alpine Shire in North East Victoria. We have three integrated acute hospital and aged care services located in the rural towns of Myrtleford, Bright and Mount Beauty.

Medical services for Urgent Care, Acute Inpatients and Residential Aged Care are provided by local Visiting Medical Officers. These doctors are local general practitioners who possess additional skills in hospital medicine, emergency medicine and other specialties such as anaesthetics, obstetrics and gynaecology, and surgery.

The skills these doctors bring to the health service are essential in enabling the provision of quality medical care for people close to their own homes and families.

Our Visiting Medical Officers form an integral part of our health service and they work closely with nursing staff and allied health professionals. They also contribute to the ongoing quality improvements in the health service through their participation in education programs, case review and policy development.

The additional skills, qualifications and ongoing education requirements for these doctors are recognised and closely monitored in our Credentialing and Privileging processes. Their advanced roles and responsibilities are reflected in our medical Scope of Practice documentation.

Our medical workforce also incorporates Rural Generalist Trainee Registrars. These are senior post graduate doctors who are undergoing supervised training to equip them with the skills required to work in remote and rural settings.

It is evident that our Visiting Medical Officers have a scope of practice which includes specialist skills not seen or normally required in General Practice. The establishment of a new speciality of "Rural Generalism" would essentially provide recognition for a sub-speciality that already exists and which plays an essential role in our team-based approach to health care delivery.

#### Myrtleford

Myrtleford District War Memorial Hospital &  
Myrtleford Extended Care Accommodation Centre Inc.  
30 O'Donnell Avenue, Myrtleford Vic 3737  
03 5751 9300

#### Bright

Bright District Hospital and Health Services  
32-36 Cobden Street, Bright Vic 3741  
03 5755 0100

#### Mount Beauty

Mount Beauty District Hospital  
2-8 Hollonds Street, Mount Beauty Vic 3699  
03 5754 3500

There are significant benefits to be gained from such recognition. Importantly, it would provide a clear career path for medical students and junior doctors who may be contemplating a career in rural medicine. Victoria has a comprehensive Rural Generalist training program pathway (the Victorian Rural Generalist Program). For doctors to be formally recognised as “Rural Generalists” at the completion of their training will encourage them to undertake what is a long and reasonably demanding training process.

Training in Rural Generalism is a longer and more challenging undertaking than standard specialist General Practice training. This should not be viewed as a disincentive; the Rural Generalist program provides doctors with the skills and confidence they need to be able practice in remote locations. In our experience, it is a lack of additional training and experience which leaves General Practitioners intimidated and discouraged by the challenges of working remotely.

Formal recognition will increase career satisfaction for existing Rural Generalists and will assist in the retention of these doctors in their remote rural communities.

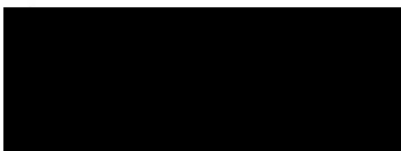
Our Visiting Medical Officers work closely with other visiting specialists who provide outreach services at our hospitals. These include general surgeons and specialist endoscopists. The anaesthetic services for the specialist operating lists are provided by local Rural Generalists. Our visiting specialists are invariably supportive and encouraging of our local Rural Generalists and the advanced services they provide.

We do not foresee any adverse consequences of recognition of Rural Generalism for our patients or communities. There is likely to be a benefit from improved access to medical care through increased training and recruitment opportunities.

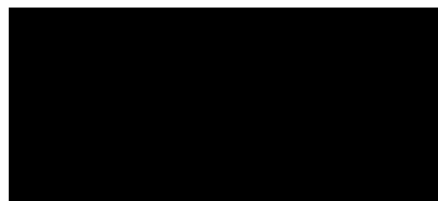
We note that there are significant potential benefits for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This would occur through increased access to doctors and also through the more thorough training in cultural awareness and understanding of First Nation’s health issues that Rural Generalism entails.

Alpine Health is supportive of the recognition of Rural Generalism as a sub-speciality of General Practice and we believe that this will offer substantial benefits for our health service and for our rural communities.

Yours sincerely



Cameron Oxley  
Board Chair



Nick Shaw  
Chief Executive Officer

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