

## **A million dollars for new Collarenebri Youth & Health Hub**

Rural and Remote Medical Services Ltd (RARMS) has welcomed the announcement today by The Hon Keith Pitt, Minister for Resources and Water, of almost one million dollars in funding for the Collarenebri Community Youth and Health Hub under the Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program.

“The aim of this Hub will be to attract the resources needed to rebuild the resilience and health of a community by addressing the causes of poor health, rather than just treating people when they get sick” said Mark Burdack.

The new Hub will expand the range of services RARMS is able to offer locally in Collarenebri, as well as help to address the social determinants of health.

“The residents of Collarenebri are strong and resilient, but they have been through tough times with the drought, bushfires, floods, the recent mouse plague and a cut in local hospital services” said Mr Burdack.

“We have a whole cohort of kids in places like Collarenebri who have grown up only knowing adversity.

“The rains have fallen and the crops are in, but it will take a lot of time and energy to address the long-term impact on people’s physical and mental health, and the psychological impact on our kids.

“The aim of this Hub will be to attract the resources needed to rebuild the resilience and health of a community by addressing the causes of poor health, rather than just treating people when they get sick.

“Over time we want to grow this Hub as a central place where people can get help with a wide range of issues from help with their studies, getting a job, addressing housing needs and so forth. If we can get these things right, the research shows that the health of the population will improve.

“If we want to improve rural and remote health and resilience, we need to stop trying to do the same things better and start doing things differently. That means working with rural and remote communities, not working on them from a distance.

“While access to a local on-site GP is central to good PHC, it is about much more than this. It recognises that people simply cannot achieve good health if they don’t have coordinated access to the right information, facilities and services.

“For example, the evidence shows that people who drop out of school in Year 10 and those that are unemployed will have poorer health outcomes over their lifetime. PHC is about working with other social, educational, community and economic services to address these underlying causes of ill health in a coordinated way.

“If we want to address the gaps in health and life outcomes in rural and remote communities, then we have to work in the community and with the community” said Mr Burdack.

The Hub will have a core focus on working with young people. It will include an Australian-first rural health mentoring centre based in an operating health service that will support local school kids who are interested in a health career. This will include study facilities, clinical experience equipment and access to a one-on-one mentor from the Australian National University School of Rural Medicine to help kids achieve their ambitions, and hopefully return to Collarenebri as health professionals.

It also deliver a community gym that will promote exercise, as well as support patient rehabilitation in the local community.

The funding will enable the construction of additional rooms to host a broader range of health and social services.

The new Hub will be energy self-sufficient which will allow services to continue even during power outages, as well as reduce operating costs to improve sustainability.

“RARMS has always been at the cutting edge of rural and remote health. The RARMS model is recognised in research as one of the most sustainable approaches to getting local GPs and health professionals into rural practice, and expanding health service access” said Mr Burdack.

“As a charity, RARMS is able to secure funding and undertake the type of coordination needed in rural and remote communities to improve health and resilience as we have done here in Collarenebri.

“We thank the Commonwealth governments for the tick of confidence in RARMS and its investment in the Collarenebri community” said Mr Burdack.

RARMS is a charity that was established to help rural and remote towns that struggle to attract and retain doctors and nurses. It has more than 20,000 active patients across 8 rural and remote locations. It currently runs the Collarenebri Medical Centre delivering on-site local access to health and medical care in the community.

Prior to joining RARMS, Mark Burdack led the rural dental school initiative for Charles Sturt University which led to a \$65 million grant to establish Australia’s first rural specific dental program. He worked with La Trobe University and Charles Sturt University to get approval for the Murray Darling Medical School Network where 80% of medical students will be from the bush. He has been the chair of the Western Research Institute that helps rural local government and businesses to develop economic strategies to support growth and sustainability. He was also the Foundation Director of LawAccess NSW that delivered equitable access to legal services for rural and remote people and was found by the Productivity Commission to be a model that other jurisdictions should follow.

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