

Health solutions needed

Outback Qld one of worst areas for GPs

ATTEMPTS to solve health woes in the North West have included more rural and remote nurses, more nurse practitioners

and better access to telehealth.

But a new Grattan Institute report, *Access all Areas*, states current strategies are not enough, arguing that new solutions must also be tried.

Outback Queensland was outlined in the report as one of the worst-served areas in the country with just 68 GPs per 100,000 people.

Places like the Sunshine Coast have nearly double that amount per 100,000 people.

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Sick waiting longer for health services

UNWELL people in Mount Isa and surrounds are getting sicker before they get care, according to a new report by the Grattan Institute.

Outback Queensland was outlined as one of the worst-served areas in the country with just 68 GPs per 100,000 people.

It's not only more difficult to see a GP, it also costs patients more, with less bulk-billing.

Health program director at the Grattan Institute, Stephen Duckett, said despite access to GPs increasing in major regional

centres, areas like North West and Central Queensland had dropped behind.

The result was more of a strain put on health services because people were even sicker by the time they reached out for care.

"We found that in areas with fewer GPs, people don't go to hospital until their condition is more advanced," he said.

"We found that in the survey evidence, that in cities about 10 per cent of people defer going to see a doctor because of the out of pocket cost, but it gets up to around 26 per cent

in remote and very remote communities, so it's a real problem.

"And what we've found is that it's then more expensive to treat them in hospital.

"There's \$30 million of excess cost associated with that extra cost of treatment, caused by or associated with, this low access."

Health Minister Lawrence Springborg said the Queensland government was working to invest in improving the knowledge and skills of nurses in rural and remote areas, with a funding

boost and more staff training.

"Last financial year the department provided almost \$2 million to support training of 101 nurses throughout regional Queensland and details of the program were outlined in the Department of Health annual report tabled in State Parliament yesterday," he said.

Dr Duckett said GP numbers were about half that of some coastal areas per capita.

"In Central and North West Queensland there

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only 68 GPs per 100,000 population equivalent, whereas on the Sunshine Coast there's about 122 almost half the number of doctors per 100,000 in the Isa and surrounds," he said.

Dr Duckett said physician assistants should be trained to work with GPs in remote areas of Queensland.

He also said pharma-

cists should be allowed to play a more important role in delivering primary care.

"What we're saying is keep in place solutions that are already there but you've got to do new things, got to do more than they're doing now," he said.

The Grattan Institute called for 101 physician assistants to be trained at

a cost of \$26 million, to work in the seven under-served regions around Australia.

The Institute estimated \$30 million would be saved in hospital costs each year by boosting GP numbers to 84 per 100,000 in the seven areas.

"The general practice in Cloncurry is really a model for some remote communities," Dr Duckett

said.

"There's a lot of GPs involved in training, they have a good link with the hospital and it seems to be a very well-run system." Dr Duckett said the difficulty of attracting more health care professionals to the North West meant that new avenues needed to be explored.

