



*Submission to*

**The Productivity Commission Health  
Workforce Study**

**From**

**The Rural Health Education Foundation**

**Prepared by**

**Don Perlgut**

Chief Executive Officer

Rural Health Education Foundation

Tel. (02) 9416-0445 or 6232-5480

Fax (02) 9416-2583 or 6232-5484

Email < [ceo@rhef.com.au](mailto:ceo@rhef.com.au) >

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See attached document of Foundation satellite sites.

# Submission from the Rural Health Education Foundation

## About the Rural Health Education Foundation

### History and Background of the Foundation

The Rural Health Education Foundation is a non-government, not-for-profit deductible gift recipient (DGR) organisation which utilises satellite technology, the Internet and “enduring materials” (videos, DVDs & CD-Roms) to provide a television-based education and information “life line” to Australian regional, rural and remote health professionals. These doctors, nurses, pharmacists, health managers and allied health personnel would not otherwise have an opportunity to undertake timely continuing professional education or receive information emanating from national launches or events of national importance. The Foundation maintains offices in Sydney and Canberra. For more information on the Foundation, visit our website at [www.rhef.com.au](http://www.rhef.com.au)

Over the past thirteen years, the Foundation has expanded its role in distance education. The Foundation has an expanding satellite network of more than 590 sites (which includes 44 new sites that have been installed in the past six months) in all states and territories of Australia. It is estimated that the Foundation’s network will exceed 600 sites by October 2005, with new sites in particular concentrating in remote and very remote areas and on health services which service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Foundation’s digital satellite network – called the Rural Health Satellite Network – is the largest of its kind in the world.

The Foundation’s programs are broadcast in Australia a number of times each month, and strive to meet the professional development needs of all disciplines. They dissect major health issues and provide information on the latest and best health and community care practices. They also address the prevention and current management of common health problems. They feature presentations from health professionals who are leaders in their disciplines, and allow for input from the target audience on material presented. The panels usually include a rural health professional.

To the doctors, pharmacists, nurses, administrators and other health workers involved, the programs are invaluable. The satellite, Internet and videos/DVDs ensure that these professionals gain access to continuing education, without the need for them to find locum support or leave their communities.

Increasingly, the Foundation is seeking to improve the relevance of its programming to rural and remote communities by producing and broadcasting programs based on promoting a multidisciplinary approach to health care.

The Foundation plays a pivotal role in assisting governments and professional bodies to recruit and retain health workers in rural communities by addressing the unique education and information needs of both communities and health workers in regional, rural and remote Australia. The target audiences for our broadcasts generally include the following professional groups in rural Australia:

<b>Professional Group</b>	<b>Number in rural Australia</b>
General Practitioners	7,000
Rural specialists	1,200
Nurses	70,000
Pharmacists	4,500
Allied health	15,000
Aboriginal health workers	1,000
Health service managers	4,500
<b><i>Total possible audience</i></b>	<b><i>103,200</i></b>

The Foundation archives most of its programs on its website for at least one year, and much longer when appropriate. This makes it possible to access the programs at any time of the day through web-streaming. Video – and increasingly DVD - copies of all programs are also available.

## **Partnering in a Rural Health Education Foundation Program**

The Foundation has undertaken partnerships and received funding from a wide range of organisations. Aside from extensive work with various branches and sections in the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, other organisations include: Andrology Australia, Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, National Heart Foundation, National Asthma Council, NSW Breast Cancer Institute, the Family Planning Association and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine. We have also received untied educational grants from a number of pharmaceutical companies, including Merck Sharp & Dohme (which helped to found the RHEF), AstraZeneca, Eli Lilly, Roche and Wyeth.

These organisations all specialise in a particular health field and were keen for the Foundation to produce a high quality program that would educate and inform health professionals who otherwise would not have an opportunity to undertake timely continuing professional development education.

## **Professional Accreditation**

All Rural Health Education Foundation professional development programs are purely educational. They follow strict editorial guidelines and do not to promote or market pharmaceutical or other products or otherwise compromise the Foundation's reputation as an accredited educational provider. Viewers of RHEF programs may receive professional development points from the following organisations when they are members of that organisation:

- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – two points per hour;
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) Continuing Medical Education (CME) - one point per hour;
- Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) Continuing Professional Development (CPE) - one point per hour; and
- Royal College of Nursing Australia (RCNA) Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) - one point per hour
- The Australian Physiotherapy Association

## **The Rural Health Education Foundation and Aboriginal Health**

The Foundation notes that the Productivity Commission’s terms of reference for this study include attention to the needs of health and medical professionals who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.

The Foundation has adopted a formal policy on dealing with matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This policy recognises:

- the dire situation of the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia
- the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are proportionately over-represented in rural and remote Australia compared to non-Aboriginal Australians
- the health outcomes of Aboriginal Australians declines as their “remote-ness” increases, so that health outcomes consistently decline from “metropolitan” to “inner regional/rural” to “outer regional/rural” to “remote” to “very remote”
- that rural and remote health professionals have an ongoing need for updated knowledge with relation to Aboriginal health issues

The policy also establishes processes for the Rural Health Education Foundation, to the extent appropriate to the topic, include consideration of the issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In recent years, the Foundation has also produced and broadcast a number of programs of direct relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health:

- “Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care”, funded by an untied educational grant from Merck Sharp & Dohme (MS&D), with additional funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DHA) (to be broadcast on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2005)
- “Growing Healthy Aboriginal Kids – the Early Years: 1-5”, funded by an untied educational grant from Merck Sharp & Dohme (MS&D), with additional funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DHA)(to be broadcast on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2005).
- “Injury Prevention in Aboriginal Communities”, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing (June 2005).
- “Palliative Care for Indigenous People” (June 2004, with support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing)
- “Aboriginal Health Workers and Chronic Disease” (June 2004, with support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing)

- “Talking Together: Contemporary Issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health – HIV, Hepatitis and Sexual Health” (March 2003, with the Australian Society for HIV Medicine)
- “Overcoming Barriers to Screening for Cervical and Breast Cancer in Indigenous Women” (September 2003, with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners)
- “Breathing Easy: Respiratory Disease in Indigenous Children” (October 2003).
- “Indigenous Child Health” (April 2002, with support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing)
- “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Childhood Immunisation (May 2001, with support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing)

Details of these programs can be found on the Foundation’s website [www.rhef.com.au/programs/groups.html#Aboriginal](http://www.rhef.com.au/programs/groups.html#Aboriginal) or can be supplied if required.

## Comments on Other Matters of the Study

The Foundation notes the discussion in the Terms of Reference and in the Issues paper about education and training of health and medical professionals, including a reference to “life-long learning”. The Foundation wishes to emphasise the importance of Continuing Medical Education (& professional development/education) which can be provided to rural and remote professionals without their having to leave their workplaces and homes and travel to the cities. It is simply not possible for many to do so in the frequency that is desirable to maintain the currency of their professional education.

The Foundation has been using “appropriate”, scalable and user-friendly technology for delivery of important television-based educational services for many years, and has a proven mechanism and capacity for doing so. The Foundation’s programs (of which more than 130 are still current and in distribution) are available for moderate cost on video/DVD and totally free when web-streamed. Many thousands of rural health and medical professionals access the Foundation’s programs, and increasing numbers are using the Internet web-streaming.

In the past two years, the Foundation has also received funding to subsidise the free distribution of videos and DVDs to health professionals who request them. When these resources are made available for free, the Foundation finds the demand is enormous, and in fact despite the provision of many thousands of videos (and more recently DVDs), the demand does not stop. When providing free resources, the Foundation does not discriminate on the basis of “rurality”, but about 90 percent of demand for these resources come from rural and remote-based professionals and organisations. Clearly this shows the need for the ongoing provision of such materials. The Foundation is in an excellent position to continue to provide them.

# Further Information

The Foundation would be happy to discuss any of these matters in greater detail. For further information, please contact:

Don Perlgut  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Rural Health Education Foundation  
Tel. (02) 9416-0445 or 6232-5480  
Fax (02) 9416-2583 or 6232-5484  
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