

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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8 Malvina Place  
Carlton  
Victoria 3053  
Australia

T. +61 3 8344 3637  
W. [www.grattaninstitute.edu.au](http://www.grattaninstitute.edu.au)  
E. [info@grattaninstitute.edu.au](mailto:info@grattaninstitute.edu.au)

### **A plan to help a million rural Australians who struggle to see a GP**

More than a million Australians living in rural and remote areas are denied the access to basic medical care that most city dwellers take for granted, a new Grattan Institute report has found.

[Access all areas: new solutions for GP shortages in rural Australia](#) shows that in seven rural areas containing one in 20 Australians, limited access to GPs is imposing severe costs on individuals, doctors and the health system.

"This isn't just unfair, it's irrational," said Grattan Institute Health Program Director Stephen Duckett.

"People in rural areas with low access to GPs are more likely to have serious health risks. If they can't get care it will cost them, and the taxpayer, much more in the long-run."

These areas include Tamworth, Goulburn and Mount Isa, as well as the Northern Territory and most of Western Australia.

The report argues that an investment of around \$30 million a year would go a long way towards solving Australia's worst shortages.

It would also generate health benefits that could reduce the cost of hospital visits by an amount equivalent to the \$30 million investment.

The funds would support a greater role for pharmacists, especially in providing repeat prescriptions and vaccinations, and the introduction of a new health worker, the physician assistant, to expand care in remote areas.

"Pharmacists and physician assistants could take on some of the less complex tasks performed by GPs, without compromising quality and safety," Dr Duckett said.

"That would save money and free up GPs to do the complex work they are trained for."

Dr Duckett said successive government policies over decades had failed to fix the problem: at current rates of improvement it would take more than 65 years for very remote parts of Australia to catch up to the levels of GP services that big cities have today.

"Luckily there is a relatively cheap and simple answer that could be in place within five years, if we're willing to adopt new responses to an old problem."

**For further enquiries:** Dr Stephen Duckett

M. +61 (0)447 837 741 T. +61 (0)3 9035 9651 E. [stephen.duckett@grattan.edu.au](mailto:stephen.duckett@grattan.edu.au)