

Health

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 188
7 December 2022

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF believes all farmers, rural, and regional Victorians must have access to essential basic healthcare services in their community to ensure the long-term wellbeing and health of farmers and regional, rural and remote communities.
2. The VFF believes that farmers and rural and regional communities deserve equitable access with metropolitan counterparts in having timely access to necessary specialists and support services, to improve and increase quality of life and life expectancy in regional areas.
3. The VFF believes the contribution of farmer health organisations in supporting farmer and regional health is valuable and these organisations should receive the necessary ongoing funding to continue to provide services and training to support farmers.
4. The VFF values the differences between regional communities in Victoria, and believes that regional communities throughout Victoria require targeted and specific health support to adequately meet their needs and achieve the best health outcomes possible.

Workforce and Training

5. The VFF recognises that regional communities are experiencing a shortage of health professionals including doctors, registered nurses, nurses and allied health workers which we believe must be addressed for the health and safety of regional Victoria.
6. The VFF believes that a Regional Health Workforce Plan should be developed for the government to properly understand the breadth of health workforce needs across Victoria and adequately address these needs.
7. The VFF believes that health training in regional communities should be expanded to meet workforce needs in these regions and allow regionally based health professionals to remain in their local communities.



8. The VFF believes that the availability of TAFE allied health services courses must be expanded and adequately funded to improve the healthcare outcomes of those in regional communities.
9. The VFF believes that support programs to attract and retain General Practitioners should be implemented to meet community needs, as well as support programs for attracting and retaining necessary Registered Nurses, Allied Health Professionals and Specialists.
10. The VFF recognises the essential nature of emergency volunteer services to the ongoing survival of rural and regional Victoria. The VFF supports increased and ongoing funding from the Victorian state government, free training and support for emergency service volunteers and their organisations.

Funding

11. The VFF believes that health funding must at a minimum meet the rate of inflation to ensure that the investment into health infrastructure, ambulance Victoria, equipment and workforce is meeting the nominal health funding budgets implemented in previous years.
12. The VFF believes that there should be a 'No Gap Guarantee' for Urgent Care Centres, to effectively remove out of pocket expenses for patients in rural and regional areas and ensure that all Victorians have equitable access to health care in their community.
13. The VFF believes that funding models to provide rural, remote hospitals and bush nursing centres with Medicare benefits for non-admitted and non-referred patients must remain ongoing to meet community need and ensure no-gap payment for patient attendance.

Emergency and Urgent Care

14. The VFF believes that the availability of appropriately staffed Urgent Care Centres to meet regional health needs must continue accordingly to meet regional demand.
15. The VFF believes that Emergency Services Telecommunication Authority (ESTA) workforce shortages, ambulance shortages and ambulance response times in regional areas must be improved to meet minimum standards in providing care to regional Victorians.
16. The VFF believes that the state government should reintroduce their funding program to provide defibrillators and expand them to farm businesses and facilities across regional Victoria to improve the safety of more Victorians on farms.



17. The VFF believes the provision of First Aid Courses, particularly in regional areas must be expanded and increased to improve farmer safety, family and worker health outcomes.
18. The VFF supports further research on how to support and engage with rural communities to improve health outcomes and life expectancy most effectively, which is necessary to bring regional outcomes closer to metropolitan outcomes.

Mental Health

19. The VFF recognises that there is a shortage of appropriate regionally accessible mental health supports available and must be improved by increased staffing, training and funding caps for regionally located training, alongside increased incentives and mobilisation of metropolitan mental health professionals to regional areas
20. The VFF recognises that stigma around seeking assistance for mental health issues affects rural and regional community members in seeking necessary support. The VFF supports ongoing efforts to reduce stigma around mental health in regional and rural communities.
21. The VFF believes the provision of increased mental health support for farmers, particularly during a time of crisis such as drought, floods, bushfires, and biosecurity incidents is essential and should be funded appropriately by state government.
22. The VFF supports the expansion of telehealth to support farmers and vulnerable people in regional communities due to time pressures, accessibility issues, local health workforce shortages and community needs.
23. The VFF believes that digital health delivery services must be appropriately funded and staffed, whilst ensuring that this does not occur at the expense of physical services in rural and regional locations.
24. The VFF believes that rural and regional outreach program workers should be appropriately trained in understanding the lived experience of farmers, to provide the most appropriate mental healthcare to the agricultural industry.

Child and Maternal Health Services

25. The VFF supports the expansion of maternity services in regional areas to adequately meet the needs of farming families and regional communities, with maternity services to be expanded and staffed accordingly to improve family care and family safety.



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- 26.** The VFF supports ongoing state government funding to meet regional need for maternity ward staff including midwives, nurses, support staff and specialists to reduce travel times and meet patient-to-midwife ratios for regional families requiring care.

- 27.** The VFF supports increased full-time employment of midwives, to ultimately reduce the necessity of utilising casual staff and significantly reduce the overall cost burden on hospitals.

- 28.** The VFF supports increased regional paediatric services to provide comprehensive support to young farming families.