



13 MAY, 2025

CONNECTING LODDON MALLEE
HEALTHCARE Connecting Loddon Mallee
healthcare



Gannawarra Times, Gannawarra

CONNECTING LODDON MALLEE HEALTHCARE

Edmund Coleman

BESPOKE regional healthcare program Connecting the Docs is entering its next phase of growth and consolidation after receiving seed funding from the Victorian Department of Health.

Established in September 2023, the initiative comprises seven foundational health services across the Loddon Mallee - Kerang District Health, Northern District Community Health, Swan Hill District Health, Mildura Base Public Hospital, Echuca Regional Health, and East Wimmera Healthcare.

The program was formed to address ongoing regional health workforce shortages, and places particular focus on retaining doctors by streamlining professional career

pathways and aiding community integration.

Kerang District Health chief executive and Connecting the Docs chair Kellie Byron-Gray said the program has already changed the town's health workforce makeup.

"For a town with a population just under 4000, we were experiencing significant doctor shortages," she said.

"Post-COVID, around 2022, was a particularly challenging year. Ads were going unanswered.

"Connecting the Docs has brought doctors to both GP clinics in Kerang, to the point that we now have a very sustainable group of doc-

tors flowing through.

"With two founding members in the one town, Kerang is heavily invested in Connecting the Docs.

"It isn't just a program; it's a new way of thinking about how we support our medical workforce.

"How do we bring a doctor into a region, show them what their training or career pathway could look like, and then build that pathway for them?

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East Wimmera Healthcare CEO Trevor Adem, Kerang District Health CEO Kellie Byron-Gray, Echuca Regional Health executive director of medical services Dr Annemarie Newth, and Swan Hill District Health executive director Associate Professor Rex Prabhu. Picture: Supplied



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“We’re also not only connecting doctors to jobs; we’re connecting them to lifestyle, to purpose, to place.

“We’ve put doctors in touch with local sporting clubs, for example. We try to help embed doctors in our community.

“And when communities come together to support our medical doctors, the results speak for themselves.”

By unifying public health services across the Loddon Mallee, organisations that may have once competed to recruit doctors now work together.

The program is able to link doctors directly with a wide-

ranging breadth of employment and training throughout the region.

Connecting the Docs also provides an added layer of advocacy for doctors, assisting with logistical steps such as finding housing and childcare.

Echuca Regional Health executive medical services director Dr Annemarie Newth said the program was born out of a pragmatic approach to the regional workforce shortage.

“We were seeing the same pattern again and again; great doctors coming to rural placements and leaving because the vision of what the future may present was lacking,” Dr Newth said.

“There was no streamlined plan for support, integration or connection.

“Across the region we all have different models of workforces and services that are slightly different.

“By sharing our combined resources, we’re able to provide doctors with a full scope of opportunities and work with them to facilitate their careers.

“Now, we’re seeing the difference. Participants tell us they feel seen, supported and inspired to stay.

“That’s a huge shift.”