

# COVID-19

# RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

## Media release

20 May 2020

### COVID-19 shows GPs essential in disaster response

The critical role general practice plays in the health of the community has been highlighted during the nation-wide response to COVID-19.

Rural peak bodies, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Health (ACRRM) are calling for the inclusion of general practice in all disaster response planning.

Dr Adam Coltzau, Clinical Lead of the COVID-19 Rural and Remote Response, said that in many circumstances the skills of rural GPs and Rural Generalist (RG), as well as the importance of their role in maintaining the health of the community, have been overlooked.



“It was highlighted during the bushfire crisis this year that there were important roles that GPs and, in particular, RGs who have advanced skills in areas highly relevant to disaster response and recovery, that were completely underutilised.

“The way that general practice has been asked to step up during the COVID-19 crisis, and the commitment GPs have shown in doing so, demonstrates just how important this role is in all crisis situations,” Dr Coltzau said.

“At the local, state and national level, GPs, RGs and their practices must be included in Disaster Management Plans, but also critically, the planning phase.

“Just as hospitals have a disaster plan, which is linked in to their district health service plan, general practices should also have their own practice-level Disaster Management Plans, that ties in with their local and district plans, as well as the other health service plans.

“GPs, particularly in rural areas, are the people on the ground, providing care to those directly affected by whatever has befallen them, and having them, and the services they provide, integrated into the planned response at all levels is crucial to providing a cohesive mechanism for care for these communities,” Dr Coltzau said.

Inclusion in disaster response planning is particularly relevant to rural doctors because of the increased likelihood of disasters affecting rural communities, such as fire and flood, as well as the number of RG doctors with an advanced skill set likely to be of benefit in a range of emergency situations.

Remoteness can limit access to state-wide assets and support, and the rural hospital health care teams, staffed by RGs, are often the first line of defence in these situations.

“This goes across more than just massive disasters such as the bushfires and COVID-19,” Dr Coltzau said.

“In too many cases of train accidents, or even farm accidents, patients are left waiting for ambulatory services or retrieval, when there may well have been a RG doctor with critical care skills in the next town left unaware of the situation.

“We need a registered National Emergency Responder Network of doctors with these skills that are able to be called on by all levels of emergency response.

“We have learned a lot in 2020 about Australia’s preparedness for disaster; what we do well as well as what we could do better.

“The National Cabinet has been a good development that has really helped bring together our disaster plans at a National level and supported the States in their own response,” Dr Coltzau said.

“RDAA and ACRRM will be exploring what the health sector has learned from both COVID-19 and this summer’s bushfire season in a Webinar next week.

“We encourage anyone interested in disaster planning to attend the free event to hear more about the critical contribution that frontline GP and RG doctors can make in responding to disasters.”

**Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).**

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**A high resolution photo of Dr Adam Coltzau is available here:**

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/712>

**A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:**

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

**A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:**

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

**Available for interview:**

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