



Dr Aaron Davis, Dr Aleeta Fejo, Dr Donna Bacon and Dr Sean White worked together at Carnarvon Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation earlier this month. Picture: Les Cook

Shire spends 5pc of budget on GPs

GEOFF VIVIAN

Irwin Shire is spending about 5 per cent of its rates revenue on GP services this financial year, according to its chief executive Shane Ivers.

The council decided to take over the town's medical centre and employ a doctor and other staff when Geraldton-based Batavia Health pulled out of the Dongara practice earlier this year.

However, a survey by the Nationals WA showed some shires were spending more than 10 per cent of their budgets on general practitioners, while others had gone more than a year with none. Nationals WA leader Mia Davies said there was an outstanding response to the survey and the results highlighted a serious health service deficiency in regional WA under the Labor Government.

"Across the State we found 43 regional local governments were spending up to 5 per cent of their total budgets on doctors," she said.

"Another six were spending up to 10 per cent, and two were spending more than 10 per cent."

WA Health Minister Roger Cook said while the State was responsible for running public hospitals, the Federal Government was responsible for primary healthcare, including GPs.

"Western Australia badly lags the nation in the availability of GPs per head of population, with a paltry 77 GPs per 100,000 population compared to a national average of 95 GPs per 100,000," he said.

"As WA Health Minister, I can assure all West Australians I will continue to fight the bureaucrats in Canberra and the Federal Government to ensure our State gets a better deal."

Mr Ivers said the provision of rural GP services should be integrated into the Commonwealth-State shared responsibilities. "This would enable a strategic approach to the issue, better control over services delivered from the State-run country health service centres, plus provide an equitable balance between rural and city centres," he said.

Aboriginal docs find connection

GEOFF VIVIAN

GP and Yamaji woman Donna Bacon is back in Geraldton after working for a week at Carnarvon Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation with three other Aboriginal doctors for the first time.

"It was a proud moment to work with the Indigenous doctors there," Dr Bacon said.

"It is a very nice medical service and a privilege to be able to do that.

"The ultimate thing would be to have Indigenous doctors in all AMS services and close the gap."

The four doctors, who spent a week together earlier this month, said Aboriginal patients had far better health outcomes when they saw Aboriginal doctors.

Larrikia and Waarmungu woman Dr Aleeta Fejo said being Aboriginal, their families faced the same issues and risks.

"When they come to see us, they feel comfortable to talk about very personal issues and they know we will respect them and try our hardest to help them in any way we can," she said.

"That makes Aboriginal doctors working in Aboriginal health a very valuable resource."

Paakintji and Kamilaroi man Dr Sean White said even though he was from Tamworth, in NSW, being Indigenous enabled him to relate closely to his patients.

"There's a low percentage of (Aboriginal) doctors within the medical workforce," he said.

"We make up just one per cent of GPs." Originally from Mount Isa in Queensland, Dr Aaron Davis has Kalkadood, Waanyi and Eastern Arunta heritage.

He said as Indigenous doctors, they were able to

practice more holistic health care. "It's not just physical, it's a spiritual and a mental connection," he said.

"In medicine, 90 per cent of the first history we take from our patients makes our diagnosis, so if you don't get that from the beginning, you are going to get it wrong."

Dr Davis said unfortunately no research had been published about the importance of this cultural connection to clinical practice.

Dr Fejo has been working at Carnarvon during the COVID-19 pandemic but is now returning to Darwin.

Mid West leading the way in bridging digital divide

Digital technologies are having a profound impact on the way we conduct business, deliver education, experience entertainment and on life in general.

Access to new digital tools can open doors to opportunities that bring significant economic and cultural benefits and can ultimately result in social advantage, higher incomes and a higher standard of living.

Access to reliable high speed broadband infrastructure has the potential to transform communities and all sectors of the economy, including but not limited to education, health, tourism, small business, professional services, construction, manufacturing, emergency services and all forms of primary production.

Yet, because of the distances required to reach many Mid West communities and relatively small population bases, a reasonably significant percentage of the community has lived and worked in areas where the availability of high-speed internet connectivity is grossly inadequate by metropolitan standards or even absent altogether.

However, this is changing.

Recently, the Digital Farm Grants program awarded an additional \$1million to support two projects delivering high-speed, enterprise grade broadband services to an estimated 130 farming enterprises.

Improved digital connectivity to the farm will enable previously unimaginable access to digital tools, models and



products to support farm efficiency, from internet-based farm decision tools to remote monitoring.

The projects will deliver a fixed wireless network from Geraldton to Mullewa to improve speeds and 'fill the gaps' from the previous round, which covered the Chapman Valley, Northampton and North Midlands areas.

Both projects will use, where possible, existing towers deployed from the first round of the program to extend further into rural areas where connectivity is lacking.

This will deliver approximately 30,000 square kilometres of fixed wireless coverage in the Mid West!

This project has its origins in the Commission's Digital Development Strategy, a roadmap to enable the Mid West to become a connected, digitally empowered and innovative region with competitive mobile and network infrastructure, creating opportunities for growth and development.

A connected Mid West will enhance the region's appeal as a place to live, work, study and invest.

We are extremely proud to say we are fundamentally reducing the digital divide and allowing more Mid West residents to fully participate in the digital revolution.



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