

# Funding stress strains system

By LYNDAL READING

THE peak body for public healthcare in Victoria is calling for a rethink of how rural emergency services are funded.

The Victorian Healthcare Association has called for a review of rural emergency services funding, to help alleviate the pressures the services face.

VHA chief executive officer Trevor Carr said larger health services received funding for emergency departments, but small rural health services did not have dedicated funds.

Mr Carr said the review should look at access to emergency services, demand issues with high population growth

and costs borne by health services providing emergency care.

He said events including schoolies week in Lorne, and holiday population shifts placed a huge strain on some services.

"Manfield and Yarrarwonga are two places where they experience an influx of people," Mr Carr said. Bendigo and Wangaratta "might feel a bit underdone with regards to their funding", he added.

One health service told the VHA of the struggles it faced with tourism events.

"The bike rides bring dehydration and musculoskeletal injuries, schoolies week brings mass intoxication, cars and tram-

na and music festivals bring overdoses and assault," it said.

Mr Carr said tourists in rural areas expected an accident-and-emergency service similar to Melbourne, and were surprised when they received a bill from the doctor.

He said there was also a critical shortage of after-hours GPs, which placed a burden on the system.

Mr Carr said a key issue was how to maintain skills to ensure staff had knowledge needed for emergency medicine.

"Smaller health services rely on an on-call roster of GPs to provide emergency services," Mr Carr said. "They're backed



In case of emergency: rural medics say events such as schoolies week in Lorne place major pressures on their services. Picture: GREG SCULLIN

by nursing staff that require a high level of generalist skills in order to stabilise patients, even if those skills are used rarely."

The VHA is proposing a

grants system where health services can use the funds to develop their own models.

Mr Carr said the VHA was also proposing a centralised

system of data collection.

"There's no connectivity between data collection, and no way to track patient attendances," he said.