

Rural Regional Roundtable: An agenda for a new term of government

Member report



On 23 February 2023, the VHA welcomed back rural and regional board directors, executives and health service leaders from the membership to kick off the Rural Regional Roundtable (RRR) series for 2023.

The purpose of the RRR series is to bring rural and regional members together to set the priorities for the VHA's policy and advocacy agenda.

This report captures member reflections and advocacy priorities from the RRR discussion. It also includes key messages from the Department of Health presentation shared by A/Deputy Secretary Commissioning and System Improvement, Louise McKinlay.

As we settle into a new term of government, there is a strong reform agenda afoot at both a federal and state level. With this comes great opportunity to centre the sector's voice and shape and influence the policy agenda to deliver strong health outcomes for the communities our members serve.

Department of Health priorities

Louise McKinlay

A/Deputy Secretary Commission and System Improvement

The VHA extends its thanks to guest speaker Louise McKinlay who presented on key priorities for the Department before holding an extended Q&A discussion with members.

The Department is embarking on its 10-year visioning strategy that will shape the policy priorities for the sector over the next decade. The Department's vision is:

A future where Victorians are the healthiest people in the world.

Key themes to build toward the vision include:

- empower people to improve their health
- care closer to home
- foster innovations
- reduce competition
- increase collaboration.

VHA policy insights

The environment our members operate in is complex and heavily influenced by external factors. VHA policy insights shared at RRR highlight the government's reform agenda, emerging health trends and upcoming opportunities to influence throughout the political cycle.

A copy of the presentation slides can be found [here](#).

What our members told us

Topic	Member insights
Aged care reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian public sector residential aged care (PSRAC) policy and legislation is not recognised in the federal government reform agenda. • The duplication of Victorian and federal legislation has unintended impacts on the workforce capacity of Victorian PSRACs. • There is concern providers are withdrawing from community-based service delivery programs adding to the pressure on public sector care.
Increased service collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several options to improve collaboration across the system to deliver better health outcomes for communities. Options include shared service agreements, shared workforce, partnership models and centralising service governance. • Members have implemented successful collaboration models such as shared service agreements and reported they have been effective at relieving workforce pressures and reducing elective surgery waitlists. • To make informed decisions the sector requires a deeper understanding of all mechanisms to promote service collaboration, such as voluntary amalgamations and partnerships.
Local governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a fine balance between local community representation and meeting the skills-based governance matrix for health service Boards. • Needs of the local community are central when making strategic decisions that impact service design and delivery.
Capital planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no mechanism to attract capital funding that does not require significant financial investment in the completion of a capital master plan, even for low capital requests. • Members are stuck in a negative feedback loop where they are unable to fund a master plan and therefore cannot attract capital funds to upgrade hospital infrastructure. • Members will require resources to implement Health Information Sharing legislation as they transition to a central EMR system.
Increase demand and continued workforce scarcity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are experiencing continued 'bed block' and waiting lists despite investment in innovations to ease pressure. • Workforce policy solutions are having unintended consequences on members due to their metro-centric design.

VHA advocacy aims

1. **Streamline state and federal legislative requirements to improve workforce flexibility in public sector residential aged care.**
2. **Ensure governance reform is informed by independent evidence.**
3. **Establish an equitable and transparent capital planning process for all public healthcare services.**

What we will do

Advocate for the streamlining of state and federal legislative requirements to improve workforce flexibility in public sector residential aged care.

PSRAC services are required to respond to a complex set of state and federal legislative, policy and regulations requirements.



Duplication has unintended impacts on PSRAC services' ability to deliver care and find the right mix of healthcare workers to meet the compounded, and often contradictory, regulation requirements.

The VHA will connect with the PSRAC Leadership Committee, National Aged Care Alliance, Council of the Ageing Victoria and Aged and Community Care Provider Association to engage Victorian key decision makers to align state legislative, policy and regulations requirements to those of the federal government, with the aim to create greater workforce flexibility.

Ensure governance reform is informed by independent evidence.

The VHA will lead an independent report into Victoria's devolved governance structure and evaluate best practice mechanisms for service collaboration.



The report will ensure transparency to the state's policy agenda for greater health system collaboration. It will explore all options for increased system collaboration and feature robust analysis of related policy options while centring member and key stakeholder views.

Report findings will be used by the VHA to advocate for evidenced and transparent policy decisions.

Lobby the state government for an equitable and transparent capital planning process.



The VHA will build on its election campaign to continue to fight for an equitable and transparent process for capital planning. The current process for obtaining capital funding advantages services with greater resources and technical capabilities. The VHA will be calling for a series of changes to the process to create greater technical support for members, a more transparent process and clear pathways for review and feedback.

The VHA will be calling for the Department of Health to commit to:

- publish the assessment criteria for capital planning applications
- provide technical support and capacity building to assist members develop a master plan and apply for capital
- develop a mechanism to review and receive feedback on unsuccessful capital planning applications
- create transparency across funding infrastructure pipeline by publishing list of future priority health infrastructure projects.

How we advocate for our members

The VHA uses a multi-pronged approach to represent the interests of our membership. Below are some of the ways we intend to deliver on RRR advocacy aims:

Influencing through key decision makers at the Department of Health

- The VHA has standing quarterly meetings with the Secretary and all Deputy Secretaries at the Department of Health.
- We use these meeting to advocate for members priorities, influence strategic department policy decisions and gather intelligence for the membership.
- We will use upcoming meetings to advocate for the three member priorities outlined in this report, especially with Deputy Secretaries directly responsible for the priorities outlined by members at the RRR series.

Influencing through political engagement

- The VHA has standing quarterly meetings with Victoria's Minister for Health, Minister for Disability and Ageing and Minister for Mental Health and Ambulance Services. These are closed-door meetings we use to advocate for member priorities and promote member interests across political decision making.
- We represent the membership through public political processes such as parliamentary inquiries and budget submissions. This ensures the membership's voice is front and centre in formal political decision-making processes.
- We undertake several broad-scale and targeted engagement activities with Members of Parliament at both a state and federal level. We share apolitical sector insights to gain supportive political interest in member priorities.
- Key learnings from RRR will be fed throughout our public and closed-door engagements to harness political support for rural and regional public health services.

Advocacy alliances

- The VHA engage with a variety of peak bodies, advocacy groups and subject matter experts to push a shared agenda for our members.
- The advocacy aims from the RRR series will be socialised with key stakeholders to create a supportive environment for collective advocacy.

Media and public affairs

- The VHA's in-house media advisor works closely with the policy and advocacy team and our membership to shape and pitch media opportunities that support the interests of the sector.
- We will work with members who attended the RRR series to elevate our advocacy agenda with supportive case studies that can shape our media activities.
- The VHA host events with key political stakeholders. For example, in 2023 we will host a budget breakfast with government stakeholders and are planning to launch our agenda for a new term of government in Parliament House at the end of the year. Members will be invited to join political and non-political stakeholders.

What's next for RRR

The VHA extends its appreciation to members for sharing insights and shaping the foundation of our advocacy agenda for a new term of government.

The three advocacy aims from the RRR series will be a top priority for the VHA and we will continue to work with key stakeholders to progress our membership's agenda.

Next, we will be continuing our RRR series with member visits. We are excited to meet with members and visit your services to integrate local issues and service innovations into our broad sector-wide policy and advocacy agenda.

We look forward to meeting with you and your service. Our team will be in touch shortly to share further details of how your service can get involved. In the meantime, if you would like to discuss any of the topics covered at RRR, please [contact](#) Keera Weise, Senior Advisor Policy and Advocacy.

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