

MEDIA RELEASE
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New health entity can further boost digital healthcare transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed healthcare forever. Technological innovation has been one positive of the pandemic, connecting staff and linking patients with specialist services, capability, and equipment.

The Grampians Rural Health Alliance (GRHA) Digital Strategy has successfully tapped into this digital opportunity and believes this momentum can be further accelerated, should Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital, Stawell Regional Health, Wimmera Health Care Group and Ballarat Health Services come together.

Grampians Rural Health Alliance and Ballarat Health Services, Chief Information Officer Kate Nolan said that while the Alliance has worked together to upgrade infrastructure, improve cybersecurity, and create a shared digital record across all their health services, together they could achieve even more for the community.

“Together we could expand some of the clinical and non-clinical initiatives at Ballarat Health Services such as data analytics and reporting and embed some of these skills and systems and introduce them to Wimmera, Stawell, and Edenhope,” Ms Nolan said.

“From a patient and consumer perspective, imagine the ease of providing your details once rather than multiple times. For the health services, previous time spent on administrative duties could be spent elsewhere, prioritising care for our communities.”

Ballarat Health Services and Wimmera Health Care Group are already benefiting from closer collaboration in the Information Technology (IT) department as they share services and staff. Wimmera Health Care Group, Director of Finance and Corporate Services Mark Knights said the relationship between the two health services has led to increased education and allowed them to access a greater staffing pool.

“Currently we have IT team members from Wimmera Health Care Group on secondment to Ballarat Health Services, to manage the IT service desk and do some specialised work to improve the region’s network. In return, if we have critical staff going on leave, we can fill positions temporarily without us having to worry about loss of service,” Mr Knights said.

“In terms of the IT workforce, the skills are quite niche, and it can be tough to recruit for. There is talent in the regions, however career progression previously has been limited. Now they can have those opportunities to advance and learn while staying local.”

Increased collaboration between the IT departments have had positive flow on effects for Edenhope & District Memorial Hospital. The Wimmera Health Care Group has been managing IT for Edenhope since 2012.

Edenhope & District Memorial Hospital, Chief Executive Officer Andrew Saunders said the ICT agreement in place has been fantastic and seamless.

“COVID has increased home working and learning to a new level. IT work is mostly conducted remotely, with staff occasionally travelling from Horsham to Edenhope when required for installation and complex maintenance tasks,” Mr Saunders said.

“The partnership has worked very well for us and it’s just another example of what can be shared.”

For Kate Nolan, she’s excited about where the increased collaboration could take the health services and the region.

“It’s about how we can further standardise across the region and make sure everyone is having a similar positive experience – the same quality care and technology everywhere you go. You can achieve more together than you can separately.”

For more information on how the proposed health entity will work and to have your say, visit careforourregion.com.au.

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