



## Healthcare in the Western Downs

### OPPORTUNITY:

The Western Downs offers plenty of opportunities across the healthcare and social assistance sectors.

- In 2016, health care and social assistance made up 7.5% of total employment in the Western Downs, compared to 13% of employment across Queensland
- As at June 2018, health care and social assistance made up 1.6% of registered businesses by industry, compared to 5.8% across Queensland
- The GP to Population Ratio in the Western Downs is 820 (2019) compared to 527 (2018) in Toowoomba. This demonstrates the region's capacity to take on more GPs (Health Workforce Queensland).



Image: Dr Vern Madden

The Western Downs has a lot to offer for medical and healthcare providers looking for an opportunity to contribute to regional communities. Relocating to the Western Downs comes with benefits in lifestyle, rural culture, and available opportunities in business and professional development.

Dr Vern Madden, who worked as the General Practitioner (GP) in Tara for 11 years and is now the director of The Health Advantage in Toowoomba, said that the rural GP role has a lot to offer.

*"You become a complete practitioner through the treatment of a diversity of conditions and illnesses in everyday practice,"* Dr Madden said.

*"There is an element of challenge and ongoing learning that stretches your abilities and knowledge as a doctor."*

The growing population in the Western Downs has a higher birth rate than the Queensland average, which highlights the potential for health and medical professionals to provide continuity of treatment for current and future generations.

*"As the local GP, there is a sense of community that you belong to as you get to know your patients and often their extended families."*

*"The rural culture can be very welcoming, providing an ideal lifestyle in which to raise a family."*

*"There are many opportunities for Allied Health and other medical professionals to make a difference in the lives of the communities in the Western Downs,"* Dr Madden said.

**"As outlined in our Corporate Plan, Western Downs Regional Council advocates for a suite of regional health services providing our residents with 'whole of life care.'"**

Paul McVeigh, Mayor  
Western Downs  
Regional Council.

*"My wife and I lived and worked in Tara with our children for more than ten years and over that time we had many discussions with other professionals working throughout the region."*

*"While of course there are lifestyle and career differences involved with living in a rural area when compared to city living, the overall sentiment expressed was positive."*

*"I encourage others to experience it for themselves as it can be very fulfilling,"* Dr Madden said.





# **PATHWAYS:**

## **<sup>1</sup>Queensland Rural Generalist Pathway**

The Queensland Rural Generalist Pathway supports junior medical officers with fast-track training and development to become a Rural Generalist, or to develop into any other medical field. The program is a selective and flexible pathway offered across Australia to provide medical students the opportunity to explore a wide variety of clinical training and to develop the advanced skillset required to support the health needs of rural communities. Trainees are offered guaranteed access to training term experience in obstetrics and gynaecology, and anaesthetics.

Rural Generalist Fellows are strongly positioned for a myriad of job opportunities and have moved on to roles in clinical leadership, international aid work, expedition and retrieval medicine and entry into other highly specialised training programs.

## **<sup>2</sup>Allied Health Rural Generalist Program**

The Allied Health Rural Generalist Training Positions (AHRGTP) is an early career, practical and work-integrated support program for Allied Health professions in rural and remote areas. The positions are coordinated by The Cunningham Centre and Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service (DDHHS) at a statewide level and is offered by James Cook University in partnership with Queensland University of Technology (QUT). These early career rural generalist roles sit within a range of Allied Health professions including occupational therapist, pharmacist, radiographer, nutrition/dietitian, podiatrist, psychology, physiotherapist, speech pathologist and social work.

Information sourced from;

1. [www.ruralgeneralist.qld.gov.au](http://www.ruralgeneralist.qld.gov.au)

2. [www.jcu.edu.au](http://www.jcu.edu.au)







## Junior Medical Officer: Brendan Watkins

Brendan Watkins is a fourth-year medical student from the University of New England, and as a part of the John Flynn Placement Program (JFPP), Brendan has travelled to Chinchilla for placement each year, since 2018. As a part of Brendan's 8 weeks of placement across his 4 years of University study, Brendan spent time at the Chinchilla Medical Practice, also spending time at the local hospital.

Brendan said he has found it beneficial to train in Chinchilla, exposed to a variety of cases and unique procedural work.

*"The variety that you get in a day working as a doctor in Chinchilla always keeps you busy and interested. I have found emergency medicine at the hospital an exciting challenge. With limited access to investigations and imaging, making decisions and treating patients becomes much more based on clinical judgement than relying on numbers,"* said Brendan.

Brendan explains that working in a rural area, in addition to general practice, provides a real opportunity for rural generalist and procedural work.

*"There is often opportunity for obstetric and anaesthetic practice depending on local staffing. In Chinchilla the Practice is well supported with nurses, staff and resources to allow a broad range of clinical activities including procedural and diagnostic work. Surgical opportunities are available including complex skin excisions as well as anaesthetics for these such as nerve blocks. Being able to learn from highly experienced clinicians who are eager to teach and develop younger doctors is a prospect of working in Chinchilla,"* said Brendan.

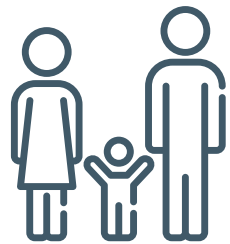
In addition to the opportunities, Brendan says that the Chinchilla medical staff and community provide time for students both professionally and personally, regularly hosting medical and other health students from the University of Queensland and University of Southern Queensland as well as John Flynn Placement Program students, providing mentorship and teaching opportunities.

*"Working rurally is an opportunity I would recommend to any healthcare worker, both as a short-term opportunity and also a longer-term career. After growing up in the city and now living rurally for the last 4 years, I have seen firsthand the issues of workforce shortage in rural areas across New South Wales and Queensland. Some towns are in crisis with shortage of medical professionals and even one year of your time can make an enormous difference to a town,"* said Brendan.

**"Demand for health care services in regional Queensland will continue to grow. The Western Downs presents excellent opportunities for health businesses and health professionals, growing their business or career."**

Jaden Frame,  
General Manager,  
TSBE Health

## FAST FACTS:



**34,467**

residents

**37.5**

years is the median age

**12.6**

births per 1000

**6.2**

deaths per 1000

**34**

Schools

**12**

Aged care services

**9**

Hospitals

**7**

Ambulance Stations

**7**

Fire Stations



Cost of living:

**\$1,209**

median weekly household income

**\$250**

median weekly rent

**\$200,209**

median house price



The information and statistics included in this document are reliant on the accuracy of sources as listed and were accurate as at the time of printing. March 2020.

## A SNAPSHOT



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE TRENDING LOWER THAN QLD AVERAGE



A SKILLED AND EXPERIENCED WORKFORCE



GRP: 139.25% INCREASE OVER 15 YEARS



DEVELOPMENT & DEVELOPERS SUPPORTED AND WELCOMED WITH WDRC PLANNING SCHEME



COMPARATIVELY STRONG INDUSTRY SUPPLY CHAINS PER CAPITA OF POPULATION

Energy Capital of Queensland: Resources & Renewables



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**NBN**

INNOVATION: NBN ROLLOUT = DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY & SPEED FOR YOUR BUSINESS

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AVERAGE DISPOSABLE INCOME \$20K HIGHER THAN QLD AVERAGE