

15-17 MAY 2026

PULLMAN ON THE PARK  MELBOURNE

Media release
15 May 2026



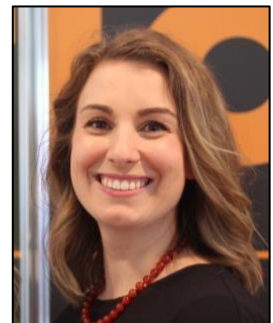
Victorian rural doctors arrive in Melbourne for election year conference

Wide range of issues, topics and pre-election concerns to headline VRHC26 this weekend

Doctors from across rural Victoria will be in Melbourne in force this Friday to Sunday, as the principal rural medical conference for the state gets underway in what is a critical election year for Victoria's rural patients, health services and hospitals.

The conference is convened annually by the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV), and brings together over one hundred rural doctors with other Victorian health sector stakeholders and medical students.

Headlining discussions at this year's conference will be the continuing stalemate from the Victorian Government in denying rural Victorians free emergency care at their local hospitals – while providing city-based patients with completely free care.



An RDAV Member Forum* on Saturday at VRHC26 will raise continuing frustrations over this and other issues.

“Many rural Victorians continue to pay for emergency care at their local rural hospitals, while people in Melbourne – and in some of the state's largest regional centres – are able to access emergency care free of charge” **RDAV President, Dr Louise Manning, said.**

“In other communities, local GPs can no longer afford to sustain both after-hours hospital emergency services and daytime general practice, leading to reduced access to urgent and emergency care for rural residents.

“Rural doctors are incensed that this inequity is being allowed to continue.

“The need for Victoria's major parties to commit to serious, long-term investment in rural hospital infrastructure will also be a key discussion point, with many hospitals across rural Victoria in desperate need of urgent upgrades.”

Another headline theme at VRHC26 will be the need to further embed Rural Generalist (RG) Medicine into the Victorian health system, with an important forum on Sunday of health leaders (from RDAA, RDAV, the Victorian Rural Generalist Program, ACRRM and RACGP) discussing the steps needed to grow the state's RG workforce, particularly given the growing tide of interest from young doctors in becoming RGs.

VRHC26 will feature the following keynote speakers:

- An opening address from **Dr Manning**:
Key health policy issues for rural Victoria in the lead-up to the state election.
- A keynote address by **neuroscientist and concussion expert, Professor Alan Pearce** (Swinburne University):
More than a 'head knock'. Sports-related concussion, CTE, and the rural doctor.
- A plenary address from **Professor Jenny May AM, the National Rural Health Commissioner.**
- A closing plenary from **Dr Simon Quilty – of the Wilya Janta (Standing Strong) Housing Collaboration**:
Improving Aboriginal Health through cultural solutions.

The conference will also feature sessions including:

- F*%ked up? What's next? From mistake to recovery in rural practice.
- Women can play ball too – kicking goals by bringing female specialist expertise to rural Victoria
- Retaining trainee doctors in rural communities
- Abortion in Victoria: reducing stigma and improving quality care in rural practice
- Management of sexual assault in rural health settings
- Improving access to fertility care for rural and regional patients

Three other panel sessions at the conference aim to facilitate conversation between medical students, junior doctors and health service recruiters on the best ways to attract young doctors to rural Victoria. The sessions are:

- **'Find my mentor'** – rural doctors will discuss how junior doctors can best find mentors or supervisors to make the most of their rural medical training journey.
- **'You should ask that!'** – future rural doctors will answer questions from senior rural doctors and rural health service recruiters on how to attract, support and get the most out of the future doctor workforce.
- **You can't ask that – but today you can!** – medical students and prevocational doctors can get their questions answered by GP/RG registrars and newly Felloved GPs and RGs who have 'survived and thrived' in rural training.

VRHC26 will also include a Mini Careers Fair (Friday afternoon) for medical students and junior doctors, to enable them to learn more about the training and career opportunities that are available in rural Victoria.

Skills workshops on Advanced Life Saving, chronic wound management and suturing are also on the program.

The Rural Doctors Association of Victoria thanks the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (Gold Partner) and Victorian Government / Victorian Rural Generalist Program (Silver Partner), as well as the other conference partners – the Rural Workforce Agency of Victoria (Gala Dinner Partner), Melbourne IVF and Partner Rural Clinical Trials Network – for their support of the conference.

Media are welcome to attend VRHC26 – please contact Patrick Daley or Ineke Kuiper to organise registration (required).

* Please note the RDAV Member Forum will be a closed forum.

Find the full conference program by [clicking here](#).

[High resolution photo of Dr Manning](#)

Interviews available via:

Patrick Daley (0408 004 890) or Ineke Kuiper (0408 669 638)