

30 March 2022

Investment in regional universities will drive Australia's prosperity

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the measures outlined in the 2022-23 Federal Budget, noting the focus on regional investment with the \$2 billion Regional Accelerator Program that will strengthen and grow regional economies.

The Chair of RUN, Professor Nick Klomp, said that the measures outlined in the 2022-23 Federal Budget demonstrate a commitment to regional development, which helps Australia to have a strong and prosperous future where all Australians can benefit from the opportunities provided by those living in regional Australia.

“We are delighted to see the focus in the budget on regional development and infrastructure, and the recognition that regional universities play a key role in Australia's regions,” said Professor Klomp

“It is widely acknowledged that industries, community and Government partner with regional universities to create strong and prosperous regional communities.

“Regional universities play a transformative role in building institutional capacity and sustainability to address the complex problems affecting our regional businesses and communities”

RUN also welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated infrastructure program for regional universities who provide vital support to our communities.

“The \$142.7 million Education Infrastructure in Regional Australia Program is a positive start to addressing the infrastructure needs of regional universities and RUN looks forward to engaging with Government to best determine the allocation of those funds”, said RUN's Executive Director, Mr Alec Webb.

“The announcement of \$118.9 million for Regional Trailblazer Universities will increase the opportunities for regional universities to demonstrate their capacity to collaborate with regional industry to deliver real solutions to emerging and current regional issues.

“Collaborating with industry and our community partners is second nature to regional universities, and it would be a challenge for regional universities to identify research that is not addressing a pressing community need.”

In addition to the infrastructure and research announcements, the budget also included \$11.3 million to support rural medical training.

“We welcome the additional Commonwealth Supported Places for commencing medical school students, however we do note that this represents only a small fraction of the need

for regionally trained medical students, and it does not address the demand we experience in other areas of critical skill shortage,” said Professor Klomp.

RUN was pleased to see \$8.3 million of funding for the establishment of a National Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast’s Thompson Institute which will be hub of clinical and technical expertise in treatment for trauma-related mental health conditions and a further \$3.9 million for the Institute’s suicide prevention program and evidence-based mental health research.

One issue that has emerged again as a result of these announcements is the definition of regionality with some universities that serve regional communities excluded from these funding initiatives.

RUN will continue to strongly advocate for, and work constructively with Government, as recommended in the Napthine Review to establish definitions of regionality that will include all regionally headquartered universities.

“We look forward to working with Government to ensure that regional universities and our communities will benefit from yesterday’s announcement,” Professor Klomp said

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