

NURSE PRACTITIONERS CAN PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED HEALTH CARE TO PEOPLE IN THE BUSH

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Australian nursing leads the world in many ways – practice, theory, education and research. But there is one area which is egregiously behind many other countries. Nurse practitioners can provide highly specialised care in a way that encompasses the whole person (rather than just a disease or condition) for a fraction of the cost of doctors. It is important to note that nurse practitioners receive the same level of education as most doctors. They must be registered nurses with a nursing degree to begin with, and then must complete specific Masters level courses as prescribed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia; some hold PhDs. Only when they hold high level postgraduate degrees, are they allowed to register as nurse practitioners with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. Only then can they be employed to use their highly developed skills, specific knowledge, and ethical practice experience.

Last year, the TJ Ryan Foundation published a [report](#) about the health of women and their ability to access health services in rural, regional and remote Queensland. Led by Professor Mary Sheehan, the research team recommended that nurse practitioners be employed, supported and educated for work in rural, regional and remote areas where they could provide a range of services that at present are missing or difficult to access for women living in the bush.

These [essays](#) in *Pearls and Irritations: Public Policy Journal* all support the concept and use of nurse practitioners, and lobby governments to promote the role through policy, funding, education and research. Nowhere is this more important than in rural, regional and remote Australia; in this time of Covid-19, it takes on even greater significance.