

Innovative training program taking steps towards addressing workforce shortages in rural and remote areas.

The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) is pleased to announce that it will receive Government funding to pilot two projects that aim to support the training of specialist dermatologists in regional, rural and remote communities.

The projects, to be piloted in Townsville and Darwin, will trial new ways of supporting dermatologists to deliver regional training and aim to address the issue of workforce shortage by increasing opportunities to work and train in regional, rural and remote areas.

The funding was awarded under the Government's Flexible Approach to Training in Expanded Settings (FATES) program and involves innovative approaches to training in rural and remote areas. The projects will focus on improving the learning experience for dermatology trainees whilst simultaneously providing access to specialist care for local communities.

The models of training support are tailored to the unique needs of local communities and will build expertise in treating skin conditions most prevalent in those areas.

The Townsville project will involve a networked model linking dermatology services at Townsville University Hospital with the Melanoma Institute of Australia in Sydney. This model provides Townsville-based dermatology registrars with access to 'virtual' supervisors, to deliver a high risk skin cancer service for North Queensland using established telemedicine platforms.

This service, using image-based melanoma detection and diagnostics, will provide Townsville and surrounding areas - areas with the highest rates of melanoma in the world - access to this expanded specialist service delivery.

Dr Aaron Boyce, who will be leading the project in Townsville says "Our community will benefit immediately from expanded services that target problems of major regional importance, such as melanoma. With support from Townsville University Hospital, we are also looking forward to introducing cutting edge technology into our clinics in the coming months, enabling us to detect melanoma at the earliest possible stage. This is all welcome news for the people of north Queensland, who live in a part of Australia that suffers enormously from the burden of skin cancer".

Pioneering new methods of specialist dermatology training, these projects are taking steps towards combatting the workforce shortage of dermatologists outside of Australia's capital cities.

"Regional Australia desperately needs more dermatologists, and initiatives like this not only improve services for our community today, they provide doctors in training with the positive experiences that we hope will bring them back to regional Australia the future. We are also showing our trainees that the quality of care provided in regional Australia is first class and that we as specialists can remain closely connected with colleagues across the country, despite the tyranny of distance" Dr Boyce said.



In Darwin, the project will involve a supervisory rotational system for specialist dermatology training. This model will increase trainee supervision and service delivery by adding visiting dermatologists to Darwin – an area with significant unmet and unique community need.

This increased capacity will provide Royal Darwin Hospital with additional consultant dermatologist supervision and build capacity for a rural training centre, where trainees can build knowledge and expertise in Indigenous, tropical and rural dermatology.

Dr Dev Tilakaratne who will be leading the project in Darwin says “The community stands to gain significantly from this initiative. Patients will be able to receive care from specialists with diverse sub-speciality expertise. In addition, it will improve capacity to increase outreach service provision to remote communities outside of the greater Darwin area”.

The focus on bringing additional supervisors to Darwin is designed to increase the knowledge of the trainee dermatologists, as well as increase the services available to the local community.

“Having the synergy of several dermatologists providing services in the Northern Territory, each with a unique skill set and areas of special interest will bring us one step closer to having a stable dermatology workforce, by improving service provision for patients and by providing comprehensive supervision for the trainee dermatologists and support for the existing dermatologists servicing Darwin” Dr Tilakaratne said.

Addressing the shortage of dermatologists in rural, regional and remote areas is high on the agenda of the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

“ACD welcomes the Federal Government’s FATES program, and we look forward to working collaboratively with the Federal Government and other stakeholders to pilot these high quality, collaborative and innovative models for trainee supervision, service provision, outreach and capacity building in currently underserved regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities”, ACD President Dr Clare Tait said.

Looking towards the future, Dr Boyce says “The program that we’re implementing here could provide a blueprint to expand training opportunities further afield in regional Australia. The model of connecting regionally-based trainee doctors in underserved regional areas with qualified consultants around the country, could open up opportunities for dermatology training not only in Queensland, but potentially across Australia”.

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About the Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD):

The ACD is the peak medical college accredited by the Australian Medical Council for the training and professional development of medical practitioners in the specialty of dermatology. They provide authoritative information about dermatology to Government, the media, other health professionals and the general public.

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