

Healthcare in Remote and Rural Areas

The Committee would now like to hear views on what policies and actions would be most effective in addressing the issues people face when accessing healthcare in remote and rural areas.

This RPS feedback has been generated from a review of the focus group and initial consultation response submitted in Summer 2023.

Are there any immediate issues unique to remote and rural communities which the National Centre will need to focus on to improve primary and community care in these areas?

- Recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.
- Equality of access to healthcare services such as hospital at home for people in remote and rural areas with those residing in urban centres.

Are there any issues which the National Centre will be unable to address, which may require further policy action from the Government?

- Capacity of local infrastructure to support the retention of healthcare professionals in remote and rural areas of Scotland e.g., affordable housing, childcare.
- There is still a need to help the public and other healthcare colleagues understand what services are available, including Pharmacy First and patient group directions available to ensure these services are accessed and utilised in community pharmacies. These community pharmacy services also need to be available in more locations to have maximum impact on other areas of the health service.
- Consider the impact on local services of the closure of care homes in remote and rural areas and the need to improve and increase resources for the teams left to pick up the burden.
- An enabler to improving the opportunities for pharmacists to contribute to improving healthcare in urban and rural areas is access to a shared electronic healthcare record.

What would you like to see included in the Scottish Government's forthcoming Remote and Rural Workforce Strategy?

- A commitment to increasing the number of registered pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in Scotland to ensure we have capacity and the correct skill mix to offer a full range of services in remote and rural areas.
- Considering the additional benefits of Anchor institutions in remote and rural areas contributing to an improved recruitment and retention profile in remote and rural areas.
- A commitment to increasing the remote and rural offering of experiential learning placements for undergraduate pharmacy students and looking at different models of being able to facilitate this.

- Opportunities to facilitate “grow your own” pharmacist plans to encourage children in remote and rural areas to see pharmacy as a career option, in addition to potential sponsorship of pharmacy university places for students based in remote and rural areas.
- An understanding of the impact on pharmacy services of not being able to recruit support staff. This then impacts on the pharmacy services that will be able to be offered.
- Consideration of the effect of the infrastructure in remote and rural areas on workforce recruitment and retention e.g., travel, transport links, fuel costs, deliveries, etc.

What specific workforce related issues should the strategy look to resolve?

- Recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, specifically including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in remote and rural areas.
- The need to allow protected learning time and support for staff to undertake training to provide services. Sometimes there is an expectation they will be offered because if they don't it would mean patients having to travel long distances to access.
- Good and comprehensive public transport links in remote and rural areas to enable staff to travel between their place of work and home.

Are there any workforce-related issues which the creation of a Remote and Rural Workforce Strategy alone will not address. If so, what are these issues and what additional action may be required to address them?

- Capacity of local infrastructure to support the retention of healthcare professionals in remote and rural areas of Scotland e.g. affordable housing, childcare.