

## Considering the country?

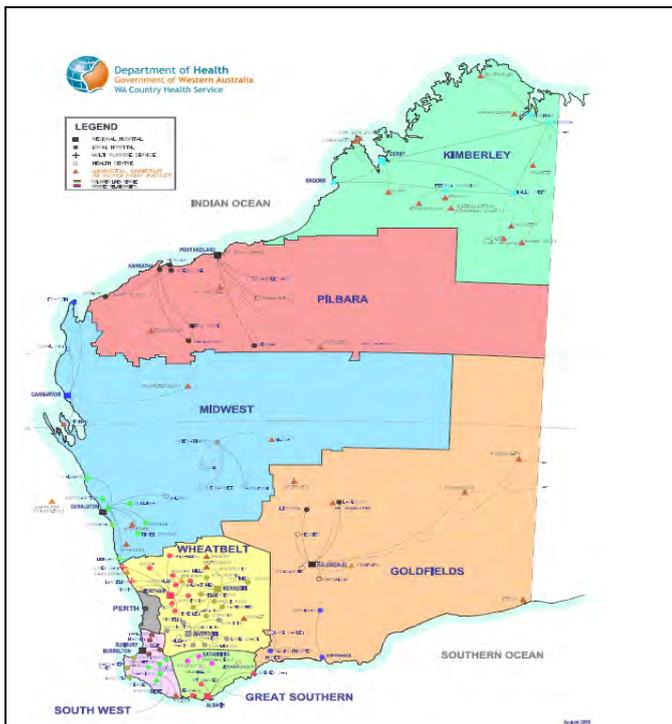


Health Professionals Guide to Country WA

Working in Country WA



# WORKING IN COUNTRY WA



million people in Western Australia’s rural and remote regions. WACHS comprises of seven regions— Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest, Goldfields, Wheatbelt, Great Southern and South West, supported by a Head Office in Perth. WACHS services acute and primary health care in more than 70 hospitals across the State, as well as a large number of nursing posts, remote area clinics, population health (community and public) centres, aged care facilities, alcohol and drugs units, and dental and mental health facilities. See appendix one for a map of WACHS.

Useful Information & Link  
WA Country Health Service  
[www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au)

The WA Country health service employs a range of health professionals including medical, nursing, health science, allied health and health workers.

## Some of the highlights...

- Develop a broad range of skills and knowledge in a unique clinical environment
- Be part of the health team, sharing and enhancing your skills
- Work and connect with your community and clients
- Make a difference to people’s life
- Feel appreciated by the community in which you work
- Learn about a range of cultures
- Develop your skills in a variety of practice settings
- Take health beyond the hospital and into the community

## WA COUNTRY HEALTH SERVICE

The WA Country Health Service (WACHS) is the single largest country health system in Australia, delivering public health services to around half a

## WORKING IN THE COUNTRY - MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION

Health professional jobs will vary significantly depending on the location. Your supports and scope of practice will also vary depending on the size of the health site - from sole practitioner to part of larger team. Research the job by talking to health professionals who are out there doing it - find out what it's like for them.

Find out about the:

- Types of services and health professionals at the site.
- Location (e.g. hospital, community health etc).
- Access to a senior/experienced professional for supervision and support.
- Requirements of the job.
- Working hours (including on call etc)
- Types of clients/caseload.



- Requirements for travel (e.g remote trips)
- Types of service delivery.
- Resources available.
- Orientation program.
- Reimbursement of relocation costs and accommodation allowances;
- Degree of remoteness or isolation of the setting;
- Study allowances, including leave to access courses and financial support to attend;
- The relief systems in place and arrangements for professional development;
- Mechanisms to support cultural awareness training and support;
- Occupational health and safety arrangements;
- Access to IT (computer, internet);

Remember, you are not only taking on a new job, but also moving to a new community - so you need to consider if both the job and the community are right for you. You need to go where you will feel comfortable and believe you will enjoy and thrive, both professional and personally. Ensure that you are prepared mentally (and sometimes physically) for becoming a country health professional, otherwise you may run the risk of becoming a rural health statistic (not lasting longer than a week).

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

All employees of WA Country Health Service are appointed under an award. Your award stipulates the basic conditions of your job. In addition to award conditions, sites may provide rural and remote specific allowances. It is recommended that you investigate the terms and conditions of the job, this may include:

- Salary levels.
- Allowances and incentives

<p>Useful Information &amp; Link</p> <p>Awards Library  <a href="http://www.health.wa.gov.au/AwardsAndAgreements">www.health.wa.gov.au/AwardsAndAgreements</a></p>
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- Relocation assistance
- Salary packaging options.
- Accommodation allowances

## Accommodation

Place of residence is a big part of moving to the country. This is the place that you spend the second most amount of time in (outside of work).

Many health sites within WA Country Health Service offer short term or long-term subsidised accommodation options. Accommodation may be furnished or non-furnished. Some areas also have access to Home Owners Subsidy Scheme. This scheme provides a mortgage subsidy for to employees who are homeowners in the local community.

Prior to employment it is recommended that you explore your accommodation options. Make sure you check out:

- Types of accommodation available.
- Rates for accommodation.
- Whether the accommodation is suitable for partners, children, and pets.
- Distance between accommodation, health site and town centre.
- Provision of furnishings, whitegoods, white goods, cookware, cutlery, crockery and linen.

## SETTLING INTO WORK

The first month of a new job can be quite stressful. Here are some simple tips to help you settle into your new workplace.

1. Participate in an orientation program as soon as you commence employment. Your orientation program should include orientation to the health service, health region/district, health site and department/ward.



2. Ask questions. From "Where's the bathroom?" to "Which tool do I use for this task?" It's OK to ask for help! Your co-workers will feel good about doing whatever they can to assist you. Let them. It's always better to have to ask the right way to do something than to try to figure it out on your own, mess up, and have to do it all over again.
3. Use your lunch hours to get together with your current co-workers (this will give you a chance to get to know them and their interests).

Some additional times provided by the National Rural Health Alliance include:

- It is quite different from anywhere you will ever have worked before. No one is expected to know the nuances and complexities of the rural & remote context from day one.
- Be prepared to say what you do not know or understand, or have not previously experienced.
- For many, those very differences and challenges make rural and remote area practice one of the most rewarding of all forms of health.
- There is much to learn, but also much for you to contribute in your new work context.

- Be prepared to share your knowledge and experience from elsewhere with the health team in your new work setting.
- Get involved in the health service. Don't just be a passenger. There is so much you will be able to contribute, even if you feel a little nervous at first. People will help, if they know you will let them, and that you are ready to go the extra mile. It will be well worth the effort in terms of your job satisfaction.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Working in country WA provides some very unique professional development opportunities.

Professional development is very well supported. You will have access to a range of local and Perth based events. Typically support to attend professional development is provided by way of assistance with travel costs, living away assistance, study days and registration fees.

### Professional Development (PD)

Health professionals have access to a range of PD, both discipline specific and generic. This relates to the broadened scope of practice of country health professionals.

PD is available via a range of mediums (satellite, videoconference, face to face, local and metropolitan) and on a range of topics. Check out



the WA Calendar of Events for a small taste of a typical month of professional development.

Useful Information & Link Calendar of Events <a href="http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/events">www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/events</a>
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### Scholarships

Being a rural health professional you have access to a range of scholarship opportunities that metropolitan health professional cannot access.

The Australian Government offers a comprehensive range of country medical, nursing and allied health scholarships for postgraduate studies, and training and development. While working as a country health professional you should consider applying for a scholarship - the opportunity may not present itself again.

Useful Information & Link Scholarships <a href="http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/scholarships">http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/scholarships</a>
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### Reference Libraries

CIAO (Clinical Information Access Online) provides 24-hour access to clinical decision and support information for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals in the WA public health care system. CIAO includes an extensive range of online full text journals, books and reference materials.

The Department of Health also coordinate an integrated library

Useful Information & Link CIAO <a href="http://www.ciao.health.wa.gov.au">www.ciao.health.wa.gov.au</a>
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system. Country staff are able to access books (loan) and copies of journal articles through the Department of Health library.

Many country health sites have access to a small range of reference materials and journals. It is recommended that you investigate the extent of sites library prior to, or on commencement, of employment.

### Graduate Programs

WA Country Health Service offers graduate programs for both Nursing and Allied Health. These programs aim to provide support to first year graduates on their entry to rural practice. If you are a new graduate, ask the health site if they offer any specific support or programs for graduate health professionals.

### Take Responsibility for Your Career Development

Part of your skills as a health professional is a commitment to life long learning. It is important that you review your career goals and development needs regularly. You should also take proactive steps towards meeting these goals. Self-directed learning can form a very important part of your career plan.

## PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

### Professional Associations

Professional Associations can be a great foundation for building professional support. Contact your relevant professional association to see what specific support they can provide you as a country health professional.

### Networks

Establishing networks is critical when you first commence rural and remote practice. Take the time to find out about:

- Health services and health partners within the community.
- Location of like discipline professionals within your community.
- Networks or meetings between like discipline groups or like program groups (local, country, state).



### **Metro/Rural Links**

The Metropolitan Area Health Services are the primary providers of most specialised health services, specifically those provided from tertiary hospitals. The Metropolitan Area Health Service also can provide support in the diagnosis and management of complex health issues.

### **Mentoring**

Mentors can provide great support for health professionals new to rural practice. Many professional association providing mentor programs. Alternatively, you may approach someone to be your mentor (e.g. past colleague). You may even like to approach someone from your new work place to be your mentor. Remember, a mentor does not need to be the same profession as you.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Email**

Most health professionals employed in WA Country Health Service have access to an email account for work purposes.

### **Intranet & Internet**

All WACHS employees have access to the Internet and Intranet sites. This may be either through a personal computer or a shared computer at the health site.

There are two primary health Internet sites:

- Department of Health ([www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au))
- WA Country Health Service ([www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au))

Intranet sites are restricted to employees only, whilst Internet sites are accessible by the general public. On arrival, spend some time “surfing” the health intranet and Internet pages. There are some great resources located on them.

### **Directories**

Directories provide a valuable

resource for connecting to other health services and people. On arrival seek out as many local, region and state directories as you can. A great starting point is the Health Service Directory. This provides a contact details and a brief summary for each health site.

Useful Information & Link

Health Service Directory  
[www.health.wa.gov.au/services](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/services)

### **Telehealth**

WACHS have established considerable videoconferencing infrastructure across country WA. Most communities have access to videoconferencing either at the local health service or via the Telecentre. Videoconferencing can support the provision of clinical services and professional development to rural and remote communities and health professionals.



## PREPARE AND ADAPTING TO RURAL AND REMOTE PRACTICE

Working in the country is different to working in the metropolitan. It can be a challenging and intensely rewarding experience. When a health professional begins work in a situation they have not worked in before, a period of adaptation is expected. This may give rise to varying levels of stress, until they find their feet and become comfortable and effective in their new setting. It is important that you examine the possible challenges that you may face in rural practice, and monitor your response to these situations. If you are aware about some of the potential source of stress (or respond to them early) you can anticipate and guard against their impact.

Challenge	Opportunity and Benefits
Wide variety of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased skill set and flexibility of service delivery</li> <li>▪ Discovery of strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>▪ Greater range of potential future career paths</li> </ul>
Fewer health resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opportunity to work in interdisciplinary health care models.</li> <li>▪ Development of a broad range of health competencies.</li> </ul>
Limited like discipline Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Forge strong inter-disciplinary ties</li> <li>▪ Learn to work with other health and community agencies</li> <li>▪ Increased professional networks</li> <li>▪ Greater communication with specialists</li> </ul>
Lack of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greater understanding of the</li> </ul>

anonymity and blurred work/home boundaries	needs of the community.
Rural specific models of service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gain greater insight into rural health and rural health service provision</li> <li>▪ Increased resourcefulness and innovation in practice.</li> <li>▪ Provision of lifespan holistic care.</li> </ul>
High degree of autonomy with often limited support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop greater independence and confidence in your professional abilities</li> <li>▪ Great flexibility in professional development.</li> </ul>
Limited access to equipment and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovative and flexible practice</li> <li>▪ Discover and try new things</li> </ul>
Increase responsibility and higher case load	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greater range of competencies.</li> <li>▪ Increased confidence and more highly developed skill set.</li> <li>▪ Strong sense of appreciation and value within the community.</li> </ul>
Having to provide culturally sensitive care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learn about different cultural groups and how to be flexible in service provision to best suit the client</li> </ul>



<p>Country life (reduced access to services)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More time and spaces to enjoy the more relaxed country lifestyle.</li> <li>▪ Chance to engage in a community life and social activity</li> <li>▪ Time to spend exploring the surrounding area</li> <li>▪ Learn more about your new town and its particular culture</li> </ul>
<p>Isolation from friends and family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Freedom to met new people and develop new friendships.</li> <li>▪ Opportunity to meet a range of people, both professionally and personally.</li> <li>▪ Chance to be more independent</li> </ul>

## RURAL HEALTH

Before commence working in country WA it's important to understand the nature of the health inequalities in rural areas, and consider how they may potentially impact on rural and remote health service provision, and your own work experience.

Useful Information & Link  
 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
[www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)

## General Health Context

People living in country areas of Western Australia experience similar health problems to those seen across the state, with circulatory diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, digestive disease, and injury and poisoning the major causes of hospitalisation and death. However, the experience and nature of morbidity and mortality in the country varies significantly from that in metropolitan areas. For example:

- People living in rural and remote areas suffer disproportionately from various chronic and communicable diseases relative to those living in metropolitan areas.
- Levels of mortality and illness increase with distance from metropolitan centres. That is the further from a metropolitan centre, the higher both mortality and morbidity.
- Death rates from all causes are higher in the country than in metropolitan centres. Of particular interest: deaths of males resulting from road accidents are up to 100% higher in remote areas than in metropolitan centres; and rural suicide rates for men aged 15 to 24 years are nearly double the metropolitan rate.
- On average, those who live in the country areas of Australia have life expectancies four years less than those experiences in urban areas. This



difference increases with remoteness; that is, those furthest from metropolitan centres are dying younger.

Several characteristics common to many rural and remote communities directly contribute to the specific health concerns experienced by people who reside in these areas, for example:

- Relative socioeconomic disadvantage, particularly poor living conditions and low levels of employment.
- Social and physical isolation.
- Specific occupational hazards inherent to rural settings, such as use of heavy machinery.
- Limited access to both health services and health professionals, including doctors, nurses, specialists, allied health professionals and support staff, and pharmacists.

### Indigenous Health

Indigenous people experience significantly worse health than all other Australians. This differential health status is apparent in both indicators of mortality and morbidity.

### Mortality

The life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is significantly lower than that of the broader Australian population:

- Indigenous males born between 1999 and 2001 have a life expectancy of 56.2 years, compared to 77 years for all Australian males. Indigenous women born in the same period have a life expectancy of 62.8 years, relative to 82.4 for all Australian females. For both males and females this represents a difference of life expectancy of roughly 20 years.
- The life expectancies of Indigenous people, women and men respectively, in present day Australia are comparable to those experienced by non-Indigenous Australian men in 1901 and

1910, and non-Indigenous females between 1920 and 1922.

### Morbidity

The morbidity profile of the Australian Indigenous population highlights many of the health inequalities experienced by Indigenous people.

- Indigenous people are more likely to suffer Cardio Vascular Disease (CVD) at all ages.
- Hospitalisation rates from injury are constantly higher in nearly every age group in the Indigenous population; assault is the leading cause for both men and women.
- Respiratory disorders, such as asthma and bronchitis, are constantly higher for Indigenous people.
- Endocrine disorders, specifically diabetes and renal disease are a major health problem for Indigenous Australians. Diabetes affects 16% of Indigenous people living in rural and remote Australia, nearly six times the national average. This high incidence of diabetes is responsible for 7.6% of Indigenous mortality; again nearly three times the national average.

Many infectious diseases disproportionately affect Indigenous people, particularly Hepatitis, Sexually Transmitted Infections, Tuberculosis and skin infections.

### WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

<p>Useful Information &amp; Link</p> <p>Health WA Office of Aboriginal Health  <a href="http://www.aboriginal.health.wa.gov.au">www.aboriginal.health.wa.gov.au</a></p> <p>Australian Indigenous Health Infonet  <a href="http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au">www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au</a></p>	<p>Approximately 8% of the country WA population are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. The proportion is considerably higher in some areas (e.g. Kimberley region a30%), and even higher still in some towns.</p>
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Aboriginal Australians experience significantly worse health than non Aboriginal Australians.

Cardiovascular disease and respiratory diseases are more common, diabetes and infectious diseases are widespread, and children are prone to ear infections and hearing loss.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are culturally different and have their own unique culture. In many parts of the state English may be the second language of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal cultural awareness and respect means having knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people's histories, values, belief systems, experience and lifestyles. It is not about becoming an expert on Aboriginal culture; however it is about being aware of the cultural differences that exist, appreciating and having an understanding of those differences, and accepting them. Health services provide a range of training and supports to enhance cultural awareness and respect.

## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

When a health professional begins work there is often a period of adaptation or adjustment. This is especially so for working in the country - as you are not only adapting to a new job but also a new community.

### Isolation

Very often the perceived isolation is directly proportional to remoteness. Isolation may relate to missing friends or relatives or simply feeling lonely in a new community. It is OK to feel lonely - it is a natural part of moving to a new community. See the previous sections for some suggestions for settling into your community.

- Rural and remote area practice can be professionally lonely. Establishing relevant professional networks is an integral aspect of your work - not an indulgence or waste of time.

- Informal mutual support networks are important, so make contact with other health professionals in the area. Accept their offers to help you 'settle in'. Accept invitations to visit other health care settings beyond your own.
- Make contact with and join a professional Association relevant to your needs. The considerable benefits include networking, professional development, context-specific advice and information about relevant opportunities and issues.
- Local members, and the associations themselves, have experience, expertise and resources specific to your needs and applicable to your work context.
- Sharing experiences, frustrations, doubts and fears among professional colleagues is important. If you have e-access in your location, set up an email network of friends and colleagues. If you don't, stay in touch by phone and become a letter writer.

*(National Rural Health Alliance, Entering Rural and Remote Practice)*

### Maintain Your links

Maintain your links with friends, family and past colleagues. Where possible try and get home when ever you feel the need. Return to your old stomping grounds can help to soothe your torn roots. Make the occasion even more memorable by scheduling a visit around a favourite season or event.

Use the phone and email as much as possible to stay in touch. Remember your families and friends are just a phone call away.

### Local Support

Your work peers can be a fantastic support to you. Don't be scared to open up to them when you are feeling particularly stressed or lonely. Remember they have all been in the same situation as you at one time or another.



### **Crisis Support**

The Bush Crisis Line provides a twenty-four hour telephone support service to multi-disciplinary remote and rural health practitioners and their families.

### **Employee Assistance Program**

The Employee Assistant Program is a confidential counselling service for all employees, partners and dependent children. Its focus is on both work based and personal problems and is free. Counselling can help you clarify problems and identify options open to you, as well as provide structure and support during difficulty times. Contact you local human resource department to find out about this program.

### **The Small Town Effect - Privacy and Confidentiality**

Living in a small town can have an impact on your privacy and professional confidentiality. This becomes more so the smaller the community you work in. The small, tight knit nature of communities often makes it more difficult to maintain confidentiality. The smaller population size means there are often unavoidable mixes of professional and personal relationships. This makes it difficult to be "off duty", especially if people ask you work related questions when they see you in out of the work context.

### **Strategies to Look After Yourself.**

It is important that you have a balanced and satisfying life both within and outside of work. Some simple times for ensure this include:

- Set realistic goals.
- Manage you time.
- Exercise
- Rest and Relax
- Take well deserved breaks (annual leave, weekends away).
- Accept the support of others.
- Admit vulnerability.

### **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS**

The range of organisations provide support specific support and services to rural and remote health professionals. Take the time to visit the appropriate websites, as they provide a wealth of information and some fantastic resources.

**Combined University Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH)** is a commonwealth funded university department of rural health. CUCRH is based in Geraldton, and can provide a range of supports to the rural practitioner, specifically relating to education, training and research.



## Centre for Rural and Remote Oral Health (CRROH)

The Centre for Rural and Remote Oral Health is a collaboration between the University of Western Australia and the Western Australian Department of Health to provide a focus to rural and remote oral health services in Western Australia. The centre focuses on research, development and education.

**National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA)** is the peak non-government organisation working to improve the health of people throughout rural and remote Australia.

**Western Australian Centre for Remote and Rural Medicine (WACCRM)** is committed to recruiting, retaining and supporting medical practitioners in remote and rural WA.

**Divisions of General Practice** aim to improve health outcomes for the community by encouraging GP's to work together and link with other health professionals to upgrade health service delivery.

**Services Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)** is nationally recognised as a peak body representing rural and remote Allied Health Professionals. SARRAH is a 'grassroots' organisation whose membership consists of individual Allied Health Professionals across rural and remote Australia

**Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANA)** aims to promote the development and delivery of safe, high quality health care to remote areas of Australia and her external Territories

**Association for Australian Rural Nurses (AARN)** aims to support rural nurses in the delivery of quality care and services to rural people. AARN is a relevant organisation to represent rural nurses in all settings and at all levels.

**Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)** is the peak professional organisation for rural medical education and training in Australia. The College has around 2000 Fellows and Registrars who practice in regional, rural and remote communities throughout Australia.

**Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA)** is a national body representing the interests of rural medical practitioners right around Australia. Their vision is for excellent medical care for rural and remote communities.

### Useful Information & Link

CUCRH  
[www.cucrh.uwa.edu.au](http://www.cucrh.uwa.edu.au)

Divisions of General Practice  
[www.gp.org.au/wa](http://www.gp.org.au/wa)

WACRRM  
[www.wacrrm.uwa.edu.au](http://www.wacrrm.uwa.edu.au)

AARN  
[www.aarn.asn.au](http://www.aarn.asn.au)

SARRAH  
[www.sarrah.org.au](http://www.sarrah.org.au)

CRANA  
[www.crana.org.au](http://www.crana.org.au)

ACRRM  
[www.acrrm.org.au](http://www.acrrm.org.au)

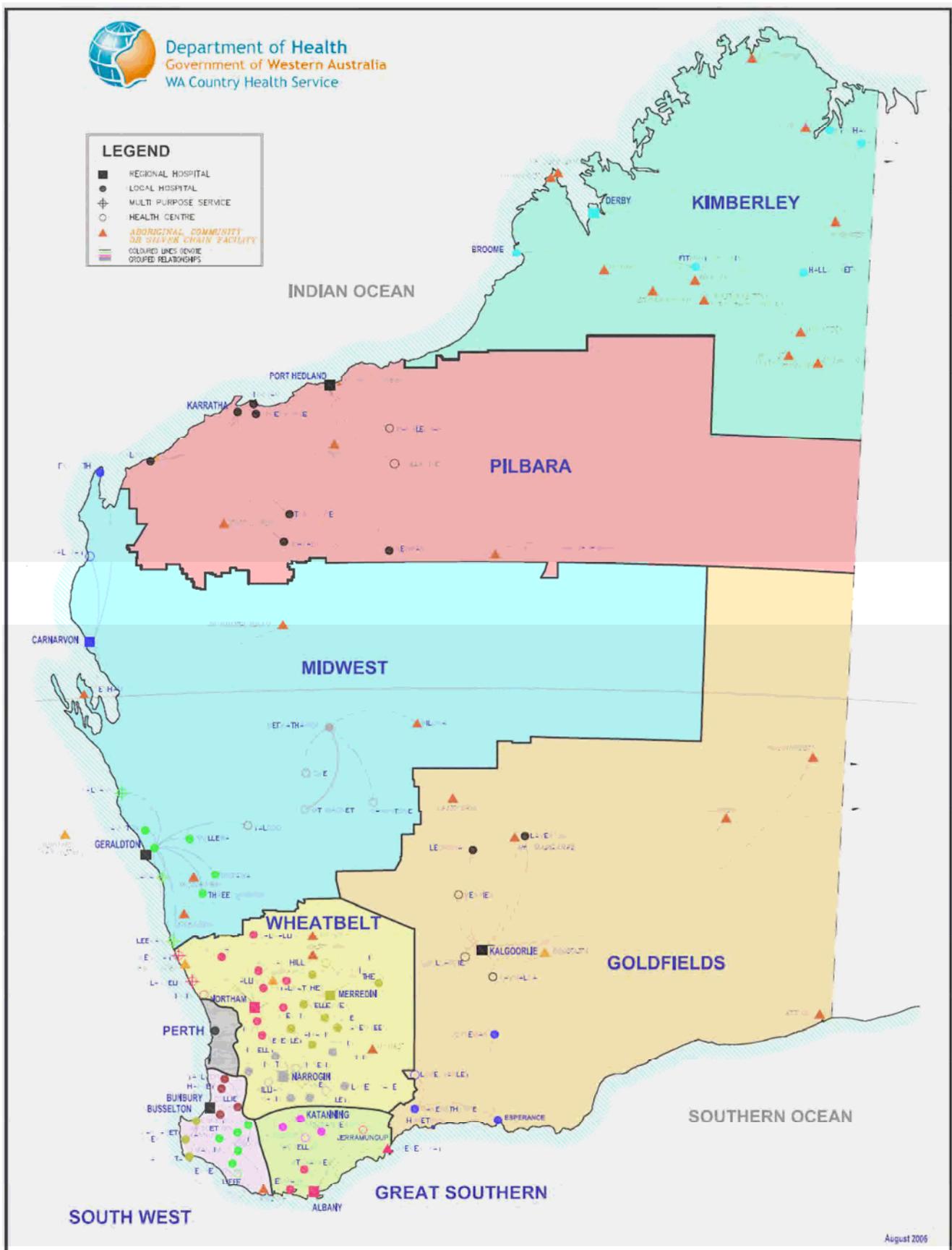
RDAA  
[www.rdaa.com.au](http://www.rdaa.com.au)

NRHA  
[www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)

CRROH  
[www.crroh.uwa.edu.au](http://www.crroh.uwa.edu.au)



# Appendix One: WA Country Health Service



WA Country Health Service

[www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au)

[wachs@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:wachs@health.wa.gov.au)

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Department of Health  
Government of Western Australia  
WA Country Health Service