

Introduction

In 2001 the AIHW was commissioned by the Office of Rural Health (ORH) in the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) to develop a framework describing rural health information and a set of indicators against which to report on rural health.

As part of this process, the Rural Health Information Advisory Committee (RHIAC) was established for the purpose of advising the development of the framework. RHIAC has representatives from a range of organisations (including ORH) with an interest and expertise in rural health issues and information. The committee met in May 2001, at a workshop in November 2001 and again in May 2002.

The resulting framework was modelled on the National Health Performance Framework (NHPC 2001) and its purpose is to:

- develop a formal understanding of the types of information that are important for understanding rural health;
- review the usefulness of available data collections towards this understanding, so laying the foundations for an ability to report in a systematic way on rural health issues; and
- to assist in identifying gaps in the data that prevent effective reporting of rural health issues.

The framework provides a focus for discussion and development so as to foster its own improvement and take advantage of improvements in data quality and availability.

The framework also lays the foundation for a systematic process to report against rural, regional and remote health issues at regular intervals and so inform rural health policy.

The development of the framework occurred in the following stages:

- consideration of the framework and its development by RHIAC;
- modelling of the framework on the National Health Performance Framework (NHPC) (see page 178);
- selection of possible indicators to provide representation across a range of dimensions within the framework;
- development of documentation for each indicator in consultation with data experts;
- review of the draft framework and indicators by RHIAC and other invited experts at a workshop in November 2001; and
- further development of the framework in line with the advice from the workshop and further consultation with data experts.

During development of the report, the RHIAC identified that people who lived outside major cities lived in a range of settings that could broadly be categorised as rural, regional and remote areas. This terminology is adopted throughout the report, although the generic term 'rural' is frequently used when referring to non-metropolitan areas generally.