



## Media Statement

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7/12/2016

### **Pilbara collaborative identifies priority areas**

Peak bodies and agencies representing Pilbara health, education, police and community have met with the aim of collectively tackling some of the region's most entrenched health and social issues.

Rural Health West and WA Primary Health Alliance, which operates Country WA Primary Health Network, convened the Pilbara Collaborative Health Forum.

Rural Health West Northwest Regional Advisor, Chris Pickett said the forum, held on 24 November 2016, was initiated to identify the region's future health workforce needs.

Mr Pickett said it was quickly identified that many of the region's key health issues can only be tackled with a more holistic, cross-agency approach.

He said that many factors can impact upon the health of a person across their lifetime.

"People who have a difficult upbringing, crowded housing and limited education typically have poorer health outcomes than others, however health agencies have little ability to change those influences," Mr Pickett said.

"We also know that poor health in turn can affect a person's ability to live a good life and may lead to poor social outcomes. It can become a very vicious circle and it's difficult for one agency in isolation to problem-solve all of these issues.

Country WA Primary Health Network Regional Manager, Winny Henry said the Pilbara Health Collaborative Forum identified many intersections between the priority areas of each agency.

Ms Henry said more than 46 per cent of the region's adults drink at potentially harmful levels and many agencies present at the forum said they are dealing with the impact of drug and alcohol misuse.

"This impacts on police who regularly intervene in public and domestic disturbances and respond to alcohol and drug-related road accidents, which occur at twice the state average. Several local media articles have noted that police are often picking up young children in the streets at night, due to caregivers drinking at home," Ms Henry said.

"The region's teachers are working hard to improve children's access to the education curriculum. It's not about kids not wanting to go to school, it's about the whole range of factors that prevent them or discourage them from going including things like hearing disorders, nutrition and access to transport.

“Health staff are dealing with both the immediate and long-term effects of drug and alcohol misuse, such as injuries, chronic disease and mental health issues.

“To improve health outcomes for people in the Pilbara we’ve got to address other factors that influence health and vice versa, which is what we’re hoping to initiate through this forum.”

As part of the workshop, participants were asked to identify priority areas where a joint response could help to improve outcomes.

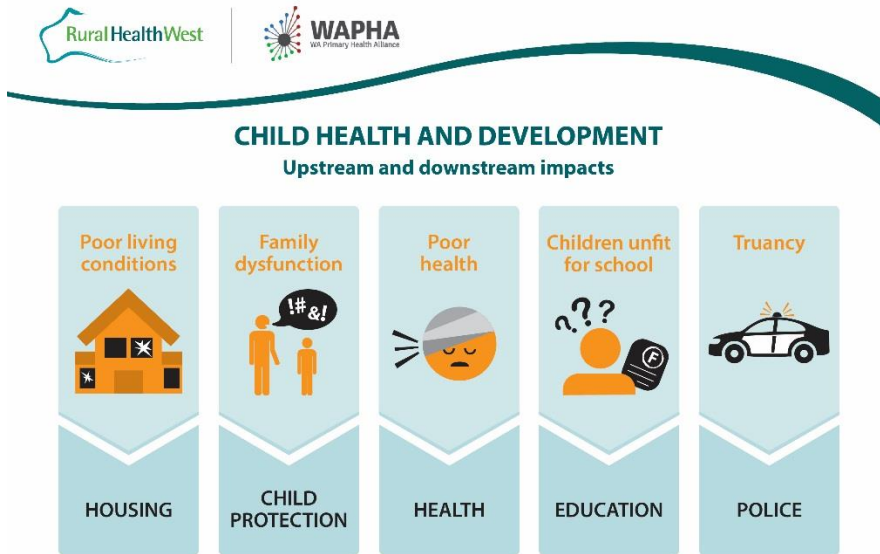
Key examples include police requesting input from schools, health providers and child protection agencies to engage with vulnerable children and their families.

Similarly, education representatives sought support from child protection, health and housing agencies to implement early intervention programs for children at risk to ensure that have appropriate housing, access to healthy food and school readiness programs.

A draft proposal relating to how workshop discussions and findings can integrate with existing forums and committees throughout the region will be considered in the near future.

## ENDS

### Image showing one of the intersections identified by the group: Child Health and Development



### Media enquiries:

Kerida Hodge, Manager Marketing and Communications

08 6389 4500

*Rural Health West is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for recruiting and retaining a highly skilled sustainable health workforce that meets the healthcare needs of rural and remote communities in Western Australia. We are primarily funded through the WA Country Health Service and the Australian Government Department of Health.*