



2024 NORTHERN TERRITORY STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES

# Designing for the future of the Territory

## Safe and long-lasting buildings in the Territory

- Commit to timely harmonisation of the National Construction Code
- Abolish Outside Building Control Areas
- Commit to improved industry safety and consumer confidence

## Building local capacity for design and construction

- Support Charles Darwin University and its development of an accredited Master of Architecture course
- Assist local graduates into local jobs
- Support the professional development of all practitioners

## Deliver value

- Appoint a Government Architect for the Northern Territory
- Adopt a consistent procurement standard

## Good Housing for all Territorians

- Invest in well-designed remote and Indigenous housing
- Embed good design at the core of the planning system
- Ensure sustainability is central to good design
- Adaptively reuse buildings for low embodied carbon
- Adopt 7-star energy rating for housing and apply accredited building science system requirements for public buildings
- Support Territorians to retrofit their homes for energy efficiency

# Safe and long-lasting buildings in the Territory

- Commit to timely harmonisation of the National Construction Code
- Abolish Outside Building Control Areas
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## Commit to timely harmonisation of the National Construction Code

Appropriate building design, which considers local climatic conditions, lowers energy usage and reduces living costs. The National Construction Code (NCC) is described by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) as

“Australia’s primary set of technical design and construction provisions for building. As a performance-based code, it sets the minimum required level for the safety, health, amenity, accessibility and sustainability of certain buildings.”

The NT is overdue for increased building standards. With the 2019 NCC Section J (energy efficiency for commercial buildings) only being transitioned into regulation in 2023, the NT has fallen behind the other states and territories in Australia. Other jurisdictions have adopted the more recent NCC 2022, which will be superseded by NCC 2025 next year. This means that by 2025, the NT risks using a building code that will be obsolete by two versions and six years out of date.

The benefits of well-designed and accessible buildings with lower energy usage will benefit all Territorians and ensure the longevity of building stock:

- Energy efficiency can reduce the need for significant government infrastructure investment (in particular, new power generation), lower household energy bills and reduce carbon emissions. The characteristics of energy-efficient homes with good ‘passive’ performance (less reliance on cooling and heating) are also those that lead to improved occupant health (such as reduced heat stress) and comfort (particularly in a warming climate). As such, they are considered as more resilient for their occupants during extreme temperature events, especially if there are power outages.
- Enabling key living areas and amenities for future adaptation to meet occupants’ changing needs and abilities, especially as they age, will mean safer, more suitable and sustainable housing. This can lead to greater independence and delay or prevent the need for entry into residential aged care, allowing older people to successfully age in place in their own communities and maintain their social inclusion. It can also improve population health outcomes such as reducing the incidence of falls and preventing costly hospitalisation for falls-related injuries for which there is a well-established authoritative Australian evidence base.

The Institute recommends that the NT harmonises the National Construction Code skipping the adoption of the NCC 2022 – residential energy efficiency and Liveable Housing Design Guidelines directly to the NCC 2025, incorporating all elements of NCC 2022.

Timely adoption of the NCC will also assure that local building practitioners’ skills and competency remains current and consistent with all Australian practitioners, allowing for better access to automatic mutual recognition and ensuring local practitioners consistently have the skillset required to deliver federally funded projects in the Territory.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare notes that:

- “Falls are Australia’s leading cause of injury hospitalisation and death, representing 43% of injury hospitalisations and 42% of injury deaths.
- Falls requiring hospitalisation occur more frequently in adults with increasing age, and are most likely to occur in the home.”

Source: Injury in Australia - Falls. July 2023. [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/falls](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/falls)

### Abolish Outside Building Control Areas

The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia that continues to define areas whereby buildings are subject to permits and standards for building (NCC and Building Regulations). Therefore, those areas where permits and standards do not apply are referred to as “outside building control areas”. The rationale for these areas continuing has been the increased cost of certification in regional and remote areas.

The Institute recommends abolishing ‘outside building control areas’ within the Territory to give everyone access to well-designed, site responsive, climate responsive, safe housing and community infrastructure that is built to last.

Any increased cost of certification in regional and remote areas is minimised by:

- Utilisation of modern technology to minimise the need for in-person inspections. The Covid pandemic has demonstrated the agility of practitioners across various jurisdictions to allow consultants and building surveyors to work collaboratively with the builder via video calls, recordings and photographs to minimise travel.
- Remote housing being certified in groups by Building Certifiers – consumers are likely to accept slight delays to occupation if building quality and compliance is increased through the certification process. Noting that it is already common practice to certify federally funded housing in groups.
- Longer term savings:
  - to building owners on poor building performance, defects rectification and insurance losses (passed on to everyone) when buildings have not performed well during cyclones or heavy rain.
  - to the health system when poor building performance leads to heat stress experienced by vulnerable older adults, those with chronic health conditions, and those living in overcrowded non-compliant/uncertified accommodation.
  - on maintenance and repairs when buildings are built to a less durable standard than the National Construction Code

Ensuring a universal and consistent approach to building throughout the NT is not just ethically desirable but necessary to mitigate potential breaches with anti-discrimination legislation<sup>2</sup>.

### Commit to improved industry safety and consumer confidence

The Institute supports the implementation of the recommendations of the *Shergold-Weir Building Confidence Report*<sup>3</sup> via the empowerment and incentivisation of the Building Advisory Committee (BAC).

The implementation of the building confidence report ensures that consumers can have confidence that all building practitioners, including architects, have the right qualifications, knowledge and experience needed to design and deliver buildings in the Territory.



Larrakeyah: Shared User Facility | BVN | Traditional Owners: Larrakia

# Good Housing for all Territorians

- Invest in well-designed remote and Indigenous housing
- Embed good design at the core of the planning system
- Ensure sustainability is central to good design
- Adaptively reuse buildings for low embodied carbon
- Adopt 7-star energy rating for housing and apply accredited building science system requirements for public buildings
- Support Territorians to retrofit their homes for energy efficiency

<sup>2</sup>Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) & Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)

<sup>3</sup>Shergold, P. and Weir, B. 2018, Building Confidence: Improving the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement systems for the building and construction industry across Australia, Australian Government.

## **Invest in well-designed Remote Indigenous Housing**

The Institute welcomes the joint Federal and Northern Territory \$4billion investment for remote housing to help Close the Gap. The institute urges considered procurement and project planning to ensure that housing is:

- Designed for the climate
- Consider climate resilience and resiliency to disaster events
- Exceeds NCC 2022 energy efficiency requirements
- Designed for full life cycle, considering operational and maintenance costs
- Designed by architects with remote communities' owners and leaders, and with full attention to master planning, siting of dwellings, and delivering designs that are highly responsive to families' composition and structure (e.g. extended families), lifestyles and local community control.
- Designated ongoing maintenance schedules outlined as part of the design process
- Post occupancy evaluations for Indigenous and/or social housing projects for both urban and remote projects

## **Embed good design at the core of the planning system**

Especially appropriate for housing in urban settings, valuing a design-led approach requires:

- Understanding housing isn't just about the building but the connection to community, creating communities that foster positive values and connectedness, i.e., avoiding social breakdown
- Developing precincts that incorporate and connect housing, education, jobs, services and green spaces from the outset, not as separate considerations
- Empower these precincts to increase density through design that focuses on livability and community integration that enshrine good design principles
- Changing the focus of housing to "Would I want to live here? Would I be happy living next door to this"
- Empower and reward housing that is design-led and community-focused
- Understanding that designing better does not have to cost more but does create more
- Ensure environmental consideration to lower the long term household cost of living.

## **Ensure sustainability is central to good design**

This requires:

- A pathway to the increasing use of low to zero-carbon building materials and acknowledging the full lifecycle implications of construction materials and methodologies.
- Designing for sustainable operations and reducing carbon operational costs.
- Social and affordable housing designed to high sustainability standards (7 stars+).
- A pathway that increases energy efficiency requirements over time.
- Recording the embedded carbon of buildings.
- Guidelines for adapting existing underutilized buildings for housing.
- New housing stock be designed with ease of renovation and adaption built-in.
- Sufficient green spaces (including adequate provision for deep soil planting) to improve amenity, natural cooling and the ability to absorb rainfall.
- Encouragement and support for more adaptive reuse projects.

### **Adaptively reuse buildings for low embodied carbon**

Conduct an audit and feasibility appraisal of unused or underutilised buildings for adaptive re-use (re-purposing) for other uses including housing to reduce embodied carbon emissions associated with demolition and full re-building.

### **Adopt 7-star energy rating for housing and apply accredited building science system requirements for public buildings**

The adoption of 7-star energy rating for housing and accredited building science system requirements for public buildings, will reduce the ongoing energy costs of the buildings to NT government, reduce the need to build new energy infrastructure and create more productive workspaces.

### **Support Territorians to retrofit their homes for energy efficiency**

One of the most effective and cheapest ways of achieving renewable energy and emissions targets is to reduce the overall energy demand. This would mean less new energy infrastructure is required as the old, high emissions sources close. The best way to achieve this is by retrofitting existing housing to reduce energy demand while making our homes safe and enjoyable places to live. The NT is hot, and nationally the record heat of the past few years has become the norm. The choice for the NT is to either pump ever more air-conditioning, increasing energy demand and prices, putting strain on the grid and demanding massive new investment in power and the grid, or we can reduce energy demand by making our housing appropriate for the new norm.

- Support upgrades to improve the passive energy efficiency of existing older Territorian housing including:
  - subsidies or rebates to retrofit energy efficiency measures to their houses, and to switch from gas to electric appliances
  - establishing education and information programs for consumers to become more aware of the benefits of passive heating, cooling, orientation, and durability when considering renovations and additions
  - mandate for re-roofing of housing to include appropriate thermal insulation and vapour barriers.



# Deliver value

- **Appoint a Government Architect for the Northern Territory**
- **Adopt a consistent procurement standard**

The NT community, taxpayers and Government need to be assured of a value return through investment in only high-quality, durable, and operationally efficient buildings that have the lowest long-term running costs. Government procurement should recognise the benefits of good design in maximising economic benefits and creating a rich legacy of innovative and sustainable buildings and urban spaces.

## **Appoint a Government Architect for the Northern Territory**

Australian and international research provides evidence that good design and architecture leads to improved liveability. Almost all Australians (97 per cent) believe that cities and towns are better to live in when public buildings and public spaces are well designed.

Governments are a central influence in delivering on community expectations of how the built environment will support Australian society and economy. In part, this is because governments across Australia are a large procurer of buildings accounting for one third of non-residential buildings. In turn, well-designed, liveable places become centres of social and economic activity creating sustainable, long-term returns on taxpayer funded investments.

Most Australian states and territories maintain the position of a Government Architect to provide leadership and independent strategic advice to government in relation to architecture and urban design. The Territory has specific environmental pressures, specific housing needs and our own way of doing things. This requires a voice that understands the Territory's complexity.

Including a role for an advisor on connecting with Country will support better work practices, relationship building and delivery of better built environment outcomes that are informed and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's knowledge.

The Institute recommends that the next Northern Territory government appoints a Government Architect who could strategically play a crucial role in NT's ongoing economic development and align NT with most states and territories in Australia. The Government Architect can add value to government through:

- Strategic project and design advisory guidance
- Leadership advocacy regarding benefits of good design and impact of built environment issues on community to ensure better outcomes for the NT government
- Leadership in the development of policy and guidelines to improve quality of the built environment. This includes: planning reform initiatives, building regulation reform, procurement of major works projects and planning for climate change.
- Research and benchmarking to ensure government activity aligns with community expectations.

Currently the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction without representation on the Government Architects Networks of Australia (GANA)<sup>6</sup>.

## **A consistent procurement standard**

*Expressions of Interest and Requests for Architectural Services*

<sup>4</sup> The Benefit of Design, prepared for Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, Galaxy Research, June 2015

<sup>5</sup> A total of \$55.2 billion of non-residential building projects were granted building approvals across Australia in the 12 months to November 2021 with public sector works representing 34% of this total. Building Approvals, Australia November 2021. Sourced from: [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/building-and-construction/building-approvals-australia/latest-release](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/building-and-construction/building-approvals-australia/latest-release)

<sup>6</sup> [gana.gov.au](http://gana.gov.au)

Quality-based selection for procurement of architectural services has consistently led to quality outcomes for important public and institutional buildings. Thorough consideration at the early stages of a project maximises the possibilities for design quality, value for money, cost-effectiveness, and a productive working relationship between the client and consultant group. Importantly, it also helps to create effective and efficient buildings and spaces that end-users and communities enjoy being in and around.

The Institute's Guidelines for procurement of architectural services set out best practice models for EOIs and RFTs at all levels of complexity and scale. The Guidelines are freely available to procurement teams from local, state and federal government departments, agencies and education institutions to optimise their architect selection processes. Adopting the Guidelines should save the Territory money, whilst creating an enviable built environment that will showcase the Territory as a leader in arid, sub-tropical and tropical urban design.

#### *Architects and contractor selection*

The Institute recommends that the lead consultant (architect) should be involved in contractor selection for NT government projects particularly where an independent superintendent has not been engaged. The benefits for the Government are that the architect will:

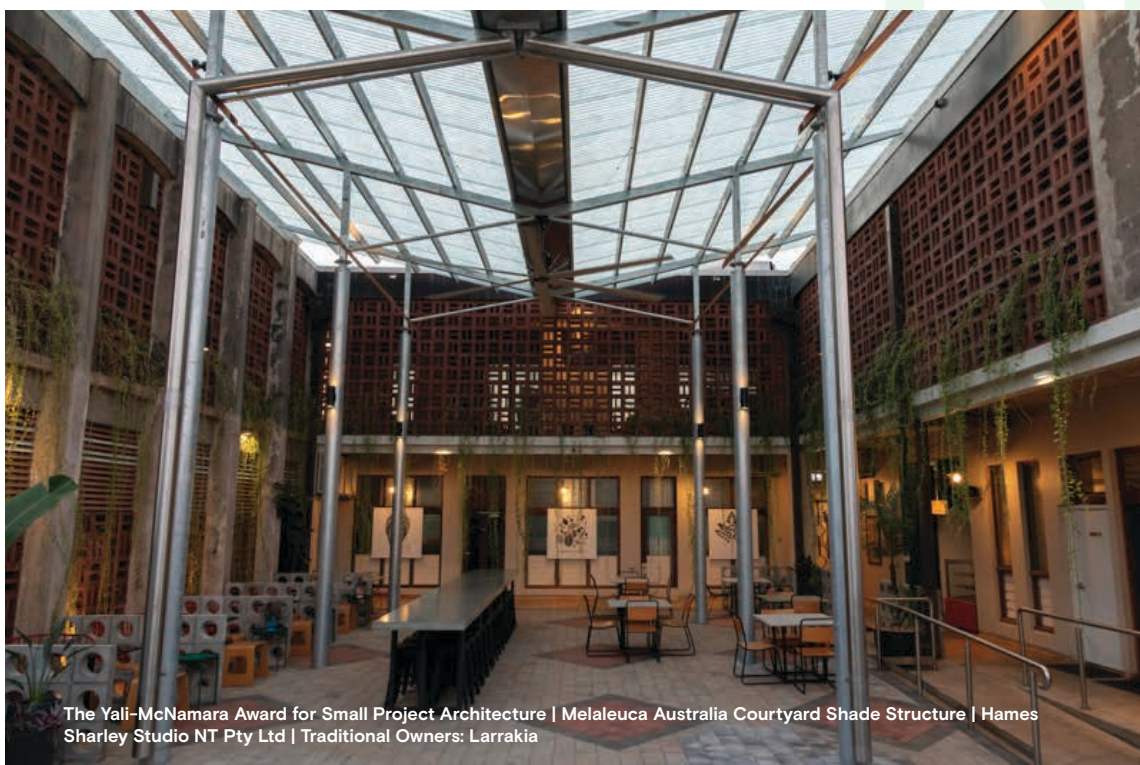
- Appraise the contractor's response to the tender to ensure design intent as approved by the relevant asset procurement agency is met.
- Work directly with contractors to efficiently address queries without compromising design intent and integrity.
- Possess intimate knowledge of the documentation, sequence and reasons why certain elements are included.

It is vital that the architect (and other consultants) have an ongoing role that is articulated in the procurement of contracts and the construction phase of projects.

They need:

- Possess intimate knowledge of the documentation, sequence and reasons why certain elements are included.
- Access to worksites to ensure quality and address problems early.
- To be involved in project control meetings and consulted on value management matters to ensure that concerns about quality are raised at a time when they can be addressed.
- Access to ensure efficient, effective and timely delivery of the project, especially regarding re-documentation of any variations that may arise.

Denying the architect these roles, threatens the quality and timeliness of projects and can lead to poor outcomes for government.



The Yali-McNamara Award for Small Project Architecture | Melaleuca Australia Courtyard Shade Structure | Hames Sharley Studio NT Pty Ltd | Traditional Owners: Larrakia

# Building local capacity for design and construction

- Support Charles Darwin University and its development of an accredited Master of Architecture course
- Assist local graduates into local jobs
- Support the professional development of all practitioners

## **Support Charles Darwin University in the development of an accredited Master of Architecture course**

The NT Chapter has strongly advocated for a local Master of Architecture course at Charles Darwin University. Following an extensive review of the current program and future directions, the Institute's recommendation is to expand the existing architecture program, update the current undergraduate degree and introduce Masters and PhD pathways.

Currently, architecture students cannot complete their studies in the Northern Territory, needing to travel interstate to complete their qualifications. Architectural practices struggle to attract graduates to relocate or return to the Territory, eroding local capacity.

The development of a Masters course is a crucial step towards Charles Darwin University in providing a local re-accredited architecture program in line with the Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure in Australia. The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) delivers the Accreditation Procedure in Australia on behalf of the State and Territory architect registration boards. In Australia, architectural graduates need to have completed their studies via an accredited program or have their architectural qualifications accredited for the purpose of entry to the Architectural Practice Examination, a prerequisite to gaining registration as an architect in the NT.

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The Institute supports the investment in Architecture at Charles Darwin University in the development of a specialised Master of Architecture course with a unique focus on:

- Arid, sub-tropical and tropical design
- Climate change and resilience
- Disaster design and responsive design
- Designing with Country and First Nations co-design

This program will also address the shortage of drafting capacity, as has been pre-identified as critically under resourced in the NT.

The NT Chapter also supports the need attract and retain academic staff into the Territory to develop ongoing local capacity, building science research and expert knowledge for design and construction best suited to the Territory.

## **Assist local graduates into local jobs**

The Territory needs architects who understand its unique needs and how to build for them. However, the high training and mentoring costs impact architects' (and other consultancy practices) ability to attract and retain new graduates. The profession Territory. Locally trained and retained architects will reduce NT's reliance on a more costly fly-in/fly-out workforce system. Importantly, this will help ensure NT has practitioners who are committed and thoroughly knowledgeable about the NT, its environment and communities to develop the best buildings and places for our Territory and its people.



### *Employer subsidies to support architecture graduates to become registered*

The extensive post-graduate and experience requirements to become a registered architect (which include a nationally governed Architectural Practice Exam , 3,300 logged hours of supervised practice and demonstrated attainment of 60 nationally governed competencies prior to oral and written exams) place a strain on NT architects to train and retain new graduates, exacerbated by the remote nature of living and working in the NT. Without architects trained and experienced in the Territory, it will be increasingly difficult to build the kind of architecture that is suited to the Territory. Support for architectural practices to train unregistered graduates on their pathway to registration could be delivered through an employer training subsidy for part of the award wage paid to a graduate.

This would help ensure that our architectural graduates can gain a supervised entry-level graduate position in a Northern Territory practice and attain the required supervised work experience to become registered under the support and guidance of experienced architects. This support could be tied to a minimum period of employment in the Territory post-training to ensure a return on investment (while building a skilled territory-focused architectural profession) and will also make them more inclined to stay once they have settled friendships and patterns of life.

Evidence shows that when regional students leave their home communities to train in major metropolitan centres, they often stay in those urban centres rather than return to their prior communities.

To overcome this problem, other professions, particularly, in the health and education fields, have developed government-supported programs to ensure training, experience and placement occurs in locations where such graduates are needed <sup>10, 11, 12</sup>.

### *HECS-HELP Relief*

A further measure that would attract and retain graduates is to relieve their HECS-HELP debt tied to a condition that they remain working in the Northern Territory for five years after they have graduated. Similar schemes operate for nurse practitioners and doctors . The amount of debt relief and the remoteness classification to determine the relief should be determined by the workforce availability, and the award wages of graduates and early years architects as set out in the Architects Award<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) delivers the Accreditation Procedure in Australia on behalf of the State and Territory: [aaca.org.au/https-aaca-org-au-wp-content-uploads-accredited-architecture-qualifications-pdf/](https://aaca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AACA-Accreditation-Procedure-2021.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>[aaca.org.au/architectural-practice-examination/](https://aaca.org.au/architectural-practice-examination/)

<sup>9</sup>See: [aaca.org.au/national-standard-of-competency-for-architects/2021nsca/](https://aaca.org.au/national-standard-of-competency-for-architects/2021nsca/)

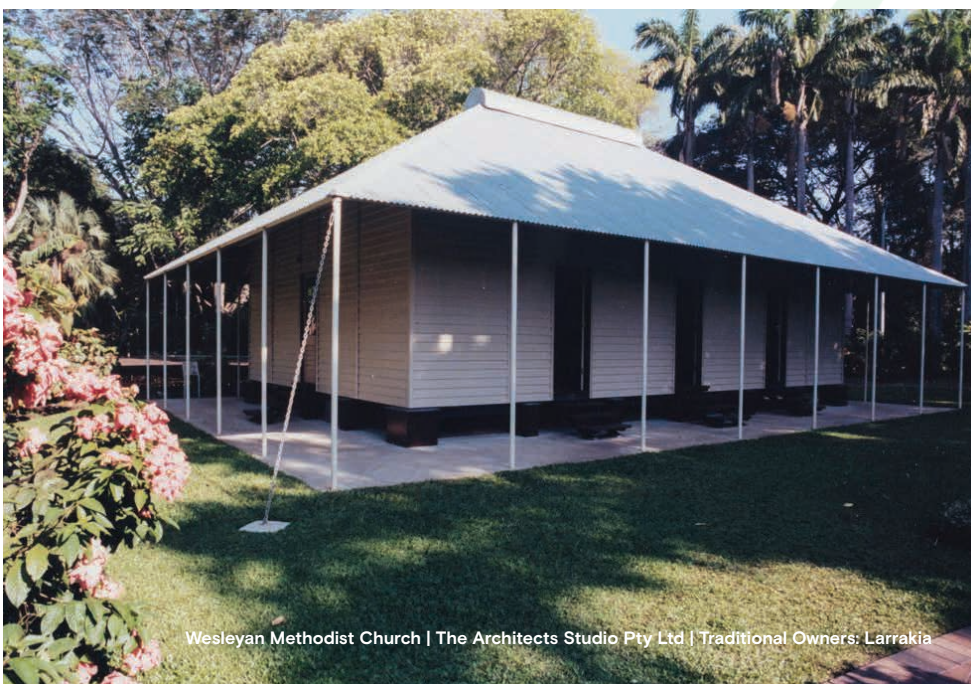
<sup>10</sup>The Become a Northern Territory doctor joint campaign of the Northern Territory Primary Health Network and the Rural Workforce Agency NT [ntneedsdoctors.acrrm.org.au/](https://ntneedsdoctors.acrrm.org.au/)

<sup>11</sup>The University of Melbourne Medical Schools Clinical School for training rural undergraduates in Medicine [medicine.unimelb.edu.au/school-structure/rural-health/rural-clinical-school](https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/school-structure/rural-health/rural-clinical-school)

<sup>12</sup>The Australian Government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program: <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/rhmt>

<sup>13</sup>See: HELP for Rural Doctors and Nurse Practitioners at [health.gov.au/our-work/help-for-rural-doctors-and-nurse-practitioners](https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/help-for-rural-doctors-and-nurse-practitioners)

<sup>14</sup>See: [fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/awards/awards-summary/ma000079-summary](https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/awards/awards-summary/ma000079-summary)



## GET IT TOUCH WITH THE INSTITUTE

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