ROYAL AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS RECEPTION TO ACKNOWLEDGE NEW FELLOWS, LIFE MEMBERS AND TASMANIAN GP OF THE YEAR AWARDS

REMARKS BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS

GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2026

Good evening.

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to Government House as we celebrate the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' new Fellows, Life Members and Tasmanian GP of the Year for 2026. We also celebrate the winner of the RACGP Practice Supervisor of the year and RACGP Practice of the Year, as well as the Professor Peter Mudge Orator of 2026.

Tonight, we recognise the skill, commitment and service of GPs, and the vital role you all play in the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

To our new Fellows, congratulations on this significant achievement. To our Life Members, thank you for your longstanding contribution to the profession. And to our Tasmanian GP of the Year, Jehan Phillips, RACGP Practice of the Year, Launceston Medical Centre, and General Practice Supervisor of the Year, Jay Shoemaker, and Peter Mudge Orator, David Knowles, sincere congratulations on this well-deserved recognition.

I begin by acknowledging the Palawa people as the First Peoples of Lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, its waterways and its communities, and I'm grateful to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to Aboriginal people joining us this evening. Aboriginal people have cared for this island and its communities for countless generations, and their continuing contribution to our State is deeply valued.

General practitioners are central to our health system. You care for people throughout their lives, manage complex conditions, support families and help patients navigate a very complex healthcare system.

Being a GP is an extraordinarily tough job! Your work is not only about diagnosis and treatment. It is also about remaining contemporary about a huge range of diseases and medical issues, many more than your specialist colleagues. It's about knowing your patients and their families, building trust and providing continuity of care. Those relationships are one of general practice's greatest strengths.

But demands on GPs have changed. Working arrangements have evolved, patient needs have become more complex and administrative pressures and paperwork have increased. Maintaining professional standards while protecting personal wellbeing is an ongoing challenge. Dare I also say that due the internet and social media, patients' expectations have also increased!

All these demands must be matched by appropriate support, sustainable working conditions and recognition of the value of general practice.

We must also address the future of the profession. Figures cited from the 2026 Medical School Outcomes Dataset suggest that the proportion of medical graduates choosing general practice has fallen from around 65 per cent historically to approximately 15.6 per cent today.

That is a significant decline. The challenge now, is how do we make general practice an attractive and sustainable career for the next generation of doctors. Happily, recently numbers seem to have stabilised and the Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) commencements in Tasmania nearly doubled between 2024 and 2026, increasing from 30 to 57.

Commencements rose by 50% in 2025, from 30 to 45, followed by a further increase of approximately 27% in 2026, from 45 to 57. This is so encouraging.

Placement incentives have also seen regional and rural communities support increased numbers of GP registrars.

These increases, of course, raise the issue of securing more supervisors and training positions, but this is a good place to be in. Changes in models of employment with State health are also being reviewed to be more contemporary, which will also help.

This matters particularly in Tasmania, where access to healthcare can be difficult in regional and rural communities. Young doctors need to see primary health care as a first-choice career, whether it be urban or rural. One that offers clinical challenge, lasting patient relationships and the opportunity to make a real difference.

Rob, who incidentally is a Life Member of the College himself, found general practice enormously satisfying. He practised for 42 years here in Hobart before retiring, and his career was a testament to the value of building lasting relationships with patients and supporting them through some of the most challenging times in their lives. It is a profession built on trust, and with that trust comes great responsibility, but also, as Rob will attest, great professional satisfaction.

That is what makes general practice so important. It combines medical expertise with long-term relationships and a commitment to serving people and communities.

It is also why tonight's achievements deserve recognition.

To our new Fellows, congratulations on reaching this milestone after years of study and dedication. I hope you take pride in what you have achieved and in the contribution you will make to your patients and communities.

To our Life Members, thank you for your sustained service and leadership. Your experience, mentorship and example, have helped shape the profession and those who follow.

And to our 2026 Award winners, congratulations on this honour. It recognises the difference that professional excellence, leadership and commitment can make to patients and colleagues.

Looking ahead, it is important that the system, indeed the community, support GPs throughout their careers, encourage more doctors into general practice and ensure experienced practitioners can pass on their knowledge.

We must also recognise that by supporting doctors, we are also supporting patients. Every Tasmanian, wherever they live, deserves access to skilled, compassionate healthcare close to home.

Finally, a strong health system depends on strong primary health care. And strong general practice depends on the skill, commitment and dedication of the people in this room.

Your achievements reflect the importance of this profession and the difference it makes to our community.

Thank you for your service to Tasmania, and for the care you provide to Tasmanians every day.

I wish you all a very enjoyable evening.