

6minutes **News**

Can you still make the financial roulette of universal bulk-billing work? This GP says he has

Dr Prashanth Reddy says the support of the townspeople — and a visit to an Indian restaurant — led him to rural Tasmania.



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Dr Prashanth Reddy outside his medical practice. Photo: The Examiner.

At a time when universal bulk-billing is financial roulette, one GP says he has found a way to build a thriving practice while providing free medical care to everyone in his community. ⁹⁶³¹

Dr Prashanth Reddy Gangapuram made the commitment in response to the support the town of Beaconsfield gave him since his arrival 18 months ago.

“The community has given me love, care and support from day one. That inspired and motivated me more,” the GP, known as Dr Reddy, tells *6minutes*.

“It increased my responsibility I feel to them. I belong to this community, they feel like family. What can I do for them?”

He originally arrived in Australia from India with his wife Dr Sandhya Reddy in 2018.

Over the next four years the couple trained in Melbourne, Perth and Hervey Bay in Queensland while bringing up two children, now aged one and five.

By the time he came to Beaconsfield — the scene of the dramatic rescue of two miners trapped a kilometre underground for two weeks following a mine collapse in 2006 — the town was set to become another statistic of shrinking rural medical services.

One practice closed in 2022 and the remaining solo GP Dr Anthony Lyall was about to retire, leaving some 6000 people without easy access to GP care.



Staff team: (from left to right) Dr Reddy, Rachel Webb, Dr Harpreet Singh, Darlene Lyall, Ruth Hill, Dr Chetan Panja and Abhilash Reddy.

But Dr Reddy bought the practice with the vision of expanding services, getting pathology in-house and bulk-billing as many patients as possible, believing in affordable healthcare for

all.

As well as the challenge of filling the large shoes of a GP who had been with the community for 30 years, he acknowledged there were financial difficulties.

“Dr Lyall was a great vacuum for me to fill,” Dr Reddy said.

“Initially, he was planning to retire in a couple of weeks, but seeing me and understanding my vision — which was a similar vision to his — he stayed with me for 12 months, helping me to gain the trust of my community.”⁹⁶³¹

Within six months he had brought on four full-time GPs, along with allied health and pathology which he said allowed him to make more effective use of his practice nurses.

The financial lifeline was the Federal Government decision to triple the bulk-billing incentives last year, especially as many of the residents were retired and pensioners.

“It eased the burden — and I felt that that was good enough for me to financially run the clinic, mainly bulk-billing.”

There are exceptions. He only bulk-bills patients from the community. Those coming from outside will usually be mixed billed, he says.

So what brought him to Beaconsfield?

Dr Reddy said he and his dad scoped out the town and practice in late 2022 where they discovered an Indian restaurant. They popped in for a curry and a chat with the owner.

“My father said, ‘My son is planning to take over this clinic. What do you think about his decision?’,” Dr Reddy recalled.

“The owner said even though the town was known as a historic gold mining town, it should be known for its gold-hearted people.

“Then he said, ‘The community will back your son’.”

And that proved true.

“From day one, I felt that,” Dr Reddy says. “I feel as though all of this has come about because of the community.”

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