



**RURAL DOCTORS
ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA**
Caring for the Country

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PM's acknowledgement of rural doctor shortage welcomed

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed public acknowledgement by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of the critical shortage of doctors and other health professionals across rural Australia, and his commitment to work quickly in resolving the problem.

In a speech delivered in Queensland last Friday, Prime Minister Rudd said: "I know enough about rural Australia to know that there is a real problem here. No matter which rural community I visit in New South Wales, Victoria, in the West or here in Queensland, there is a problem of supply of rural doctors and nurses."

Prime Minister Rudd said his Government will conduct an immediate audit of the shortage of doctors and nurses and other health professionals in rural Australia, examine the reasons for these shortages, and ask the Australian Department of Health and Ageing to provide the Government with a range of options for attracting and retaining health professionals in rural Australia.

RDAA President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, said: "We greatly welcome Mr Rudd's acknowledgement of the severe shortage of doctors and other health professionals across rural Australia, and the impact this is having on the 34% of Australians who live in country areas as well as on the future of rural towns and rural industries. It is great to see that our hard work in highlighting this worsening crisis with governments and policy-makers is having an impact.

"More than 13,000 extra health professionals — 1000 additional doctors, 5400 additional nurses, 600 additional midwives, and more than 6100 additional allied health professionals — are needed urgently in rural and remote Australia just to meet basic healthcare needs, so immediate action is absolutely critical in turning the situation around.

"Whilst we can understand that the Prime Minister, in heading up a new Federal Government, may feel he needs to assess the rural health workforce shortage through a more formal audit process, RDAA believes that action is required immediately in addressing the rural health crisis. RDAA would value the opportunity to play a central role in the Government's deliberations on what needs to be done, and provide practical advice from doctors who are working on-the-ground in rural and remote Australia.

"We hope the audit process will be undertaken urgently and completed within a short time-frame, as there is now very little time to lose before the rural health workforce crisis passes the tipping point where it will be virtually impossible to attract more health professionals to the bush and keep local rural health services open.

"We look forward to working with the Federal Government, and in particular Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon, to get rural healthcare in this country back on track."

**RDAA representatives are available for interview.
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