

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## A Debates Commission? Get real pollies! A Rural Health Commission is much more critical.

**The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) says it is staggered that Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott are spending so much time debating whether they will have another election debate when 4600 rural Australians are dying each year because they can't get adequate access to healthcare.**

"We are astonished that the leaders are taking up so much time arguing about whether they will debate each other again before polling day...and now Mr Abbott has revived Kevin Rudd's idea of establishing a Debates Commission!" RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said.

"Instead of taking up valuable time and energy establishing a Debates Commission, a Rural Health Commission would be much more useful...and shock horror, it may even save rural lives!

"This whole issue is bordering on the farcical, particularly given 4600 rural Australians are dying from preventable deaths each year because of poor access to local healthcare services—that's 12,500 rural Australians who have died since the last federal election just because they lived in the bush and not the city.

"A recent survey we undertook with the National Rural Health Alliance also found that more than 52% of rural Australians are waiting 1 or more weeks—with 18% waiting more than 3 weeks and some waiting up to 6 months—for a routine appointment with their GP.

"I don't think rural Australians particularly care whether Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott debate each other or not...what they would really like to see is a genuine focus from both sides on boosting access to healthcare in the bush.

"If there must be more election debates, let's focus instead on getting at least some community forums outside the marginal outer-metropolitan electorates and into the smaller rural towns across Australia that are crying out for better access to healthcare.

"If Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott are looking for 'remote locations' away from a studio to ensure a televised debate is fair for both of them, there are hundreds of remote locations we can suggest!

"In case Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott hadn't noticed, the rural health system is at crisis point and major new measures are desperately needed to turn the crisis around. At the end of the day, rural Australians need and want to be able to access healthcare in their local communities."

RDAA continues to call on the political parties to commit to the following key initiatives:

- **A National Rural Health Obligation**—to set the standards of access that rural Australians should expect when it comes to local health services such as general practices, emergency departments, maternity services and other basic health services
- **A National Rural Generalist Training Pathway**—to support and train the rural doctors of the future to provide essential health services in rural communities and rural hospitals
- **A Rural Rescue Package**—comprising Medicare fee for service incentives to compensate those doctors who support rural communities by providing essential medical services including hospital-based services such as accident and emergency, after-hours on-call, obstetrics, anaesthetics and surgical care
- **A range of supports for rural health services**—including improved payment arrangements for treating patients with long-term illnesses; appropriate, rurally-sensitive governance arrangements under the new

health reforms; better support for nurses in general practice; equitable access to midwifery services in rural hospitals; and better support for international medical graduates

**RDAA's Federal Election Position Statement 2010** can be found at [www.rdaa.com.au](http://www.rdaa.com.au) (go to Submissions).

**Rural Australians are still able to fill out RDAA's and the National Rural Health Alliance's five-minute online survey** about access to health services in their communities. A link to the survey can be found at [www.rdaa.com.au](http://www.rdaa.com.au).

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