

MEDIA RELEASE



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Labor's emergency specialists measure will miss the mark in the bush

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) says today's announcement by Prime Minister Julia Gillard to deliver more emergency medicine specialists to outer metropolitan and regional hospitals will do little to improve access to emergency care further out in rural and remote Australia.

Instead, RDAA has urged the major parties to introduce real measures to entice more doctors to the bush in the first place...including a National Rural Generalist Training Pathway that would not only train doctors in emergency medicine but also in other essential skills needed by doctors in rural and remote settings.

"The Prime Minister's announcement to deliver emergency medicine specialists in large regional hospitals is all well and good, and will certainly be welcome for these hospitals" RDAA Vice President, Dr Paul Mara, said.

"But in rural and remote communities across Australia we simply don't need specialist doctors who can only do emergency medicine—we need more rural generalist doctors who can do a whole range of things *including* emergency medicine.

"And we don't really need a new regime for emergency medicine training, as rural doctors generally don't have a problem with accessing this type of training already—the real problem is that there just aren't enough doctors in the bush to start with.

"Rather than trying to patch around the edges, it is time for the major parties to make the investment required to actually entice more doctors to rural generalist medicine.

"This includes introducing a National Rural Generalist Training Pathway that would take young medical graduates who want to work in rural and remote practice and train them in the advanced medical skills required in country settings, such as emergency medicine, obstetrics, anaesthetics, general surgery, acute mental healthcare and Indigenous healthcare.

"The Rural Generalist Pathway was pioneered in Queensland a few years ago and has been highly successful in delivering more doctors to rural communities in that state.

"We now want to see this highly successful Pathway rolled out nationally, as this would do a lot to encourage many more young doctors to seriously consider rural and remote medicine as their preferred career path.

"And from a federal perspective, it wouldn't cost a lot to implement.

"The time is well overdue for the major parties to stop making announcements that purport to deliver more doctors to the bush but that simply miss the mark again and again.

"This election, rural Australians want to see real measures to deliver doctors and other health professionals to their communities...not the usual fudge."

As well as a **National Rural Generalist Training Pathway**, RDAA is also calling on the major parties to commit to introduce:

- **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 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 (go to Submissions).

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) are also urging all people who live in rural and remote Australia to fill out a five-minute online survey about access to health services in their communities. A link to the **National Rural Health Consumers Survey** can be found at www.rdaa.com.au.

Available for interview: Dr Paul Mara on 0466 665 933 and RDAA CEO Steve Sant on 0419 770 010.
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