

MEDIA RELEASE



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Rural doctors call for ‘a fair shake of the sauce bottle’ this election

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) is calling on all parties contesting the federal election to commit to provide rural communities with their fair share of health funding to improve local access to healthcare in the bush.

Releasing RDAA's *Federal Election Position Statement 2010*, RDAA President Dr Nola Maxfield said over the past three years the Rudd/Gillard Government had been busy shaking up the health system but rural doctors hardly got a dribble of extra funding.

“Kevin Rudd was famous for calling for a ‘fair shake of the sauce bottle’ and we think it is about time someone shook the bottle our way,” Dr Maxfield said.

“For too long healthcare in rural Australia has been overlooked, and it is time this great inequality is addressed.

“We know that Australians living in the bush have shorter life expectancies and poorer health outcomes than their city cousins. With at least 17,000 more health professionals needed in rural areas, including an extra 1800 doctors, urgent action must be taken to turn the worsening rural health crisis around.

“We call on all the parties to make a fair dinkum commitment to addressing these inequalities and to set a higher standard of access to local health and hospital services for those living in rural communities.”

This election, RDAA is calling on the political parties to commit to introduce three key initiatives to support rural Australian communities:

- **A National Rural Health Service Obligation**—to set the standards of access that rural Australians should expect when it comes to local health services such as general practices, maternity services and other basic health services
- **A National Rural Generalist Training Pathway**—to support and train rural doctors of the future to provide essential health services to rural communities and rural hospitals
- **A Rural Rescue Package**—to reward those doctors who choose to support rural communities by providing medical services in the bush and who provide essential hospital-based services such as obstetrics, anaesthetics and surgical care.

“With a swing against the Gillard Government a real possibility, marginal rural seats will play a big role in this election,” Dr Maxfield said.

“Given that almost a third of all Australians live in the bush, addressing the continuing rapid deterioration of the health services available to them would be a real vote winner.

“That many of these people have to wait up to nine weeks for a basic consultation or drive hundreds of kilometres to access a doctor is a national disgrace.

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“Without doctors who can provide essential services such as obstetrics, general practice and health promotion many rural communities have a bleak future.

“We are calling on the parties contesting this election to secure the support of rural Australians by committing to improve the health services available in rural communities.”

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 Consumers Survey** can be found at www.rdaa.com.au.

Available for interview: Dr Nola Maxfield on 0418 335 344 and RDAA CEO Steve Sant on 0419 770 010.
Alternative media contact: Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.