

MEDIA RELEASE



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Hung Parliament just what the doctor ordered

The hung parliament could be the best thing for rural health if independent MPs stand up for their electorates, according to the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA).

Dr Nola Maxfield, RDAA President, said that with three independent MPs from rural seats, there is a unique opportunity for rural Australia to have a real voice in how health is provided in rural Australia.

“Now is the time to move to address the rural health crisis,” Dr Maxfield said.

“The seven million Australians in rural and remote areas have the worst health outcomes in the nation, and we have been struggling for years to get Government to address this life-and-death issue.

“If rural communities are to continue to provide the real horsepower in the Australian economy, we must ensure they have access to decent infrastructure including good health services.

“With the balance of power now in the hands of the independents, we hope that Kennedy MP Mr Bob Katter, New England MP Tony Windsor and Lyne MP Rob Oakeshott will step up to the plate on rural health,” Dr Maxfield said.

“Even inner city Melbourne MP, Adam Bandt, and Andrew Wilkie in Denison, should have a natural interest in promoting the health outcomes of Australians in the bush.”

Rural health has long been overlooked by Government, with health a major issue for voters in rural areas during the 2007 election and still top of the list in 2010.

“It is of great concern that health will again be the major issue in 2013,” Dr Maxfield said.

“For the independent MPs considering which side of politics they will support in the new parliament, a key consideration clearly needs to be which party will address the concerns rural Australians have about access to health services.

“The party that can tick the boxes that will ensure we build a well-trained health workforce in rural Australia must be supported.”

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

- **National Rural Health Obligation** – to set out the minimum standards of access that people who live in the bush can expect to health services
- **National Rural Generalist Training Pathway** – to support and train the rural doctors of the future to provide essential health services to country communities and hospitals
- **Rural Rescue Package** – to rewards doctors that choose to support rural communities and provide essential hospital-based services

- **Support for rural health services** – payment arrangements for treating patients with long term illnesses, rurally sensitive governance arrangements and equitable access to midwifery

RDAA's Federal Election Position Statement 2010 can be found at 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.

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