

MEDIA RELEASE



Tuesday 27 July 2010

Rural doctors welcome additional mental health funding

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed today's announcement by Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon of additional funding for mental health services, saying it will help increase access to mental healthcare for rural and remote Australians.

"Access to care for depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns is a big issue in the bush" RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, said.

"While the incidence of mental illness in rural and remote Australia is similar to that in the city, the outcomes are often significantly worse because of difficulties in accessing treatment.

"Suicide rates are up to 30% higher in the bush than the city, with many rural and remote regions of Australia showing suicide rates above 15 per 100,000 population compared to the national average of 11.8.

"While today's announcement of increased mental health funding is not only targeted at those living in the bush, any measures that assist rural doctors and other rural health professionals to meet the enormous demand for mental healthcare in their communities is welcome.

"It is also good to see additional support being provided to frontline community workers such as financial, legal and relationship counsellors to better identify and respond to those at risk of suicide, and additional funding to enable improved access to respite for the carers of those with severe mental illness.

"We also welcome the establishment of an annual National Report Card on mental health and suicide prevention, and additional funding for community-led suicide prevention services.

"While the funding announced today is still a long way short of that required—particularly when you consider the extent of the problem—it is good to see that the Government recognises more funding is still required in this critical area, and it is nevertheless a step down the right path.

"This election, RDAA has reiterated its call for the major parties to commit to introduce a National Rural Health Obligation that would establish a minimum level of access to local healthcare and hospital services in rural and remote Australia, including mental healthcare.

"We are also asking the major parties to commit to introduce a National Rural Generalist Training Pathway which would see young medical graduates trained in a range of advanced skills that doctors need in rural practice, including obstetrics, anaesthetics, emergency medicine, surgery, acute mental healthcare and Indigenous healthcare."

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: RDAA CEO Steve Sant on 0419 770 010.
Alternative media contact: Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.