

# MEDIA RELEASE



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(Embargoed interviews also available Monday)

## 12,500 rural Australians needlessly dead

Since the federal election three years ago, 12,500 rural Australians have died preventable deaths as a result of poor access to healthcare services — 4,600 each year\*.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has called on the parties to get their priorities right this election and focus on improving access to healthcare for the seven million Australians who live in the bush.

RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said that since the last federal election in 2007 more than 12,500 rural Australians have died who would still be alive today if they had the same level of access to healthcare as those who live in the city.

“RDAA is calling on Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott to focus on issues that are important for the many Australians who live in the bush or who travel or holiday in country areas—like their health” she said.

“This election has seen a lot of political energy directed at ‘stopping the boats’. Since August 2008 there have been only 7183\*\* illegal immigrants arrive by boat — a long way short of the 12,500 rural families directly affected by the preventable death of a family member since the last election.

“We want to see this level of energy directed at fixing rural health and call on Mr Abbott to take up the catchcry of ‘stop the rural deaths’ and Ms Gillard to ‘move forward on rural health’.”

Dr Maxfield said that for too long healthcare in rural Australia has been overlooked and overshadowed by issues affecting a relatively small percentage of the population.

“More than one-third of Australians live in the bush, and they suffer from higher mortality rates, higher suicide rates, more deaths from cancer and lower life expectancy compared with urban Australians” she said.

“These are not just numbers but real people with real families who are suffering, and dying, needlessly.

“RDAA has repeatedly pointed this out to government and politicians, but what little action they take has been totally inadequate.

“We must improve access to healthcare services in rural and remote Australia. We call on all the parties to commit to addressing these inequalities and to set a higher standard of access to local health and hospital services for those living in country communities.”

This election, RDAA is calling on the political parties to commit to three key initiatives that would improve access to healthcare in rural Australian communities:

- **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

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- **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

**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 also being urged to fill out a 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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**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.

\* Based on Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures of 4600 excess rural deaths per annum (from *Australia's Health 2010*).

\*\* Friday facts email, authorised by Brian Loughnane for the Liberal Party of Australia.