

MEDIA RELEASE



Monday 16 August 2010

Tele-health measure builds rural bridges on broadband superhighway

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed today's announcement by the Gillard Government that it will provide \$392 million to better support access to tele-health services for rural and remote Australians.

The Government has announced:

- the expansion of Medicare rebates to cover doctors or nurses attending a tele-health consult with patients (currently, Medicare rebates are not paid for doctors attending tele-health consults, with the exception of limited support for tele-psychiatry consults).
- incentives for rural and remote practices to enable tele-health consults to be provided by the practices
- a training fund to support any required upskilling of rural doctors and nurses in relation to providing tele-health consults

"The importance of tele-health technology in improving access to healthcare in the bush has been a key issue on which RDAA has lobbied for many years" RDAA's immediate past-President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, said.

"While this technology should never be seen as a replacement for local doctors and other health professionals in country communities, it does provide a very useful additional tool in enabling diagnosis and follow-up for a range of conditions, saving patients the time and cost of travelling what can be thousands of kilometres to see a specialist in person.

"Consequently, it is great to see the Gillard Government announcing measures that will support the further rollout of tele-health technology for rural and remote Australians, and particularly its decision to widen the Medicare rebates for tele-health consults to ensure the time and skills of doctors at both ends of the consult are recognised."

This election, RDAA is calling on the political parties to commit to a number of 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
- **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).

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.

Available for interview: RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, on 0419 770 010.

Alternative media contact: Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.