

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## Rural Aussies urged to SHOUT! as pollies give health the silent treatment

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) is urging rural communities across Australia to hold 'decibel-breaking public meetings' in the closing weeks of the federal election campaign to show how concerned they are with poor access to local health services and the worsening shortage of rural health professionals.

The call comes as the major parties continue to ignore the rural health crisis in the lead-up to polling day...despite 12,500 rural Australians having died preventable deaths as a result of poor access to healthcare services since the last federal election three years ago.

"The huge turnout at recent public meetings in the rural NSW communities of Wagga Wagga and Pambula alone show the significant concern that is festering in the bush when it comes to accessing local healthcare" RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, said.

"Around 5000 people met at the weekend in Wagga Wagga to protest ongoing delays with, and underfunding of, development of the region's new hospital.

"And hundreds braved wet, cold and windy conditions in Pambula last week to attend a public meeting that brought together local candidates to hear the community's continuing concerns around the closure of Pambula Hospital's maternity unit.

"In Western Australia, a major meeting of local government representatives featured a dedicated session on the worsening crisis facing access to local health services in that state's country communities.

"And at a public forum convened last week in Townsville by ABC Radio's *AM* program, local access to healthcare was raised repeatedly as a major issue for local voters.

"The plain fact is that, despite the extreme lack of attention being given to rural Australia and rural healthcare in this election, seven million Australians live in the bush, many of them live in marginal electorates...and all of them care about whether they can get access to a doctor, other health professionals, a hospital and other local health services.

"Given the major parties are giving rural health the silent treatment this election, rural communities need to get out the megaphones and let our pollies know exactly what they think about the erosion of health services in the bush."

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](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:** RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, on 0419 770 010.  
Rural Doctors Association representatives from most states are also available for interview—phone Patrick Daley (number below) for contact details.

**Alternative media contact:** Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890.