

MEDIA RELEASE



Friday, 30 July 2010

Coalition rural health policy way off-target

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has slammed the new rural health policy proposed today by the Coalition saying it shows a complete lack of understanding of the issues affecting rural health.

RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said that this proposed policy will do nothing to address the health inequities presently suffered by rural Australians and improve rural people's access to local health services.

"For a start, the \$6.7 million per year budgeted for their program is a pitiful amount compared to the \$1 billion underspend of Medicare funds to the bush each year.

"But this aside, the Coalition's policy doesn't just miss the mark, it is so far off-target we are in danger of friendly fire," Dr Maxfield said.

"We need real initiatives not just to recruit medical professionals to the bush, but to retain them once they are there.

"Doubling the number of Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships awarded will make absolutely no difference, particularly if the number of years they have to stay in the bush is decreased from six to three."

Dr Maxfield said that programs need to focus not only on attracting doctors into the bush, but keeping them there long term.

"To entice doctors into specialising in rural generalist medicine, we need to equip them with the necessary skills and reward them for the high level services they provide, such as emergency medicine, obstetrics, anaesthetics and surgery.

"The introduction of a National Rural Generalist Training Pathway to take medical graduates wanting to work in rural and remote practice and train them in the advanced medical skills required in country settings, is the first step towards encouraging young doctors to seriously consider rural and remote medicine as their preferred career path.

"The Rural Generalist Pathway was pioneered in Queensland a few years ago and has been highly successful in delivering more doctors to rural communities in that state," Dr Maxfield said.

"It is time that both the Coalition and the Labor Party paid attention to rural voters, stop the spin and implement some policies that will actually make a difference to the health care services available to people in country towns."

RDAA is also calling on the major parties to commit to introduce:

- **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 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 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).

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

Available for interview: Dr Nola Maxfield on 0418 335 344 and
RDAA CEO, Steve Sant, on 0419 770 010

Alternative media contact: Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638