

# MEDIA RELEASE



Tuesday 7 September 2010

## Hospital funding first step only to rural health fix

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed the re-election of the Gillard Government, and has welcomed Prime Minister Julia Gillard's announcement that the next round of federal hospitals funding will be available for regional and rural hospitals.

But the Association has warned that fixing the rural health crisis will require much more than just one round of hospital funding—it will need a systematic, big picture approach that also builds the rural health workforce and ensures the sustainability of rural practices and health services into the future.

"It is great to see Prime Minister Julia Gillard announcing that the next round of funding under the national Health and Hospitals Fund will be available for regional and rural hospitals, but this is just one small part of a much larger, systematic approach to rural health policy and funding that is needed to turn the rural health crisis around" RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said.

"Building new wings on some of our regional and rural hospitals and putting in extra beds will certainly be welcomed, but this will not in itself address the urgent need for an additional 17,000 health professionals, including 1800 doctors, in the bush.

"In reality, there are many areas of rural healthcare that need significant funding before the Government can reasonably say it has delivered equitable access to healthcare for those living in country Australia.

"RDAA has pointed out over many years the \$1 billion underspend each year in Medicare services to those living in the bush. We have also pointed out the alarming results from our recent RDAA and National Rural Health Alliance survey on rural health, which showed that:

- more than 52% of rural Australians are waiting 1 or more weeks—with 18% waiting more than 3 weeks and some waiting up to 6 months—for a routine appointment with their GP
- 62% of rural Australians are experiencing a significant shortage of health professionals in their area
- 66% of rural Australians had to travel away from their local area in the past year to receive non-emergency medical treatment—including 160 kilometres or more to access a GP and 2000 kilometres or more for things like cancer treatment

RDAA is urging the Gillard Government and country independents to implement:

- **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—and a requirement for there to be **rural proofing** of all proposed federal health policies and measures to ensure they do not negatively impact on rural communities and existing rural 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

“We sincerely thank the country independents, Bob Katter, Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott, for their hard work over the past weeks in getting a better deal for rural Australians not just on rural healthcare but a range of issues.

“We now look forward to working with Prime Minister Gillard, her government and the country independents during this next term to ensure rural Australians get the access to healthcare they need and deserve.”

---

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

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