

MEDIA RELEASE



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Katter misses health mark by country mile

Bob Katter has shown a lack of understanding of the health needs of rural Australians with country hospitals and health services barely getting a look-in on his 20 point wish list.

Dr Nola Maxfield, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), said she was extremely disappointed with the low priority he has given rural health.

"Health services are consistently listed as the number one concern for rural Australians," Dr Maxfield said.

"That Bob Katter thinks of shooting and fishing (at #6) before health crosses his mind (at #11) clearly shows his disregard for the majority of his constituents – as well as the other 7 million Australians living in rural areas – and indicates his complete lack of understanding regarding this issue.

"In fact, his only concern about the health sector making his top 20 is that local hospitals should be run by local boards.

"*Wake up Mr Katter...* there is more to health than a building and a management committee. You have completely overlooked the real issue for rural health – workforce.

"What good will a local board do if they can't find doctors or nurses to staff their hospital?"

Interim results from a RDAA and National Rural Health Alliance survey on rural health have clearly demonstrated the dire straits of rural health care and the results were alarming.

"Responses showed that 62% of rural Australians are experiencing a significant shortage of health professionals in their area, and in the past year more than 63% were unable to receive a variety of health services – such as cancer care, maternity services and specialist care – because of this shortage," Dr Maxfield said.

"In some rural communities, it now takes up to 24 weeks – that is six months! – to get a routine appointment with a GP, and travel of 160 kilometres or more to access this visit is common."

RDAA wrote to Mr Katter two weeks ago outlining what needs to be done to attract more doctors, nurses and other health professionals to the bush.

"None of our recommendations have got a look-in," Dr Maxfield said.

"If Bob Katter really wanted to make a difference to the lives of his constituents and other rural Australians, he would ensure that the next government will:

- work to establish a **National Rural Generalist training program** to ensure rural Australia gets doctors who are able to provide services in both rural general practice and in rural hospitals
- increase the **Medicare rebates paid to rural patients** in the 2011/12 Federal Budget
- develop and sign off with state and local government a **National Rural Health Obligation** that sets the minimum standard of health care access that should be attained by all communities in rural and remote Australia

- **review hospital and medical infrastructure support in rural hospitals** and medical practices in small rural and remote communities to quantify the investment required to ensure they are able to provide services to the next generation of rural and remote Australians.

“For too long rural Australia has had no voice in the parliament.

“It will be a great tragedy if Bob Katter, Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott don’t stand up for rural health and cost lives in the bush.”

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