

MEDIA RELEASE



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Broadband superhighway to where?

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has criticised the idea that the expansion of the National Broadband Network (NBN) will help rural Australians access specialist health care, as most Medicare consultations don't allow video conferencing.

RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said that while she welcomed the announcement of the expansion of the NBN, rural patients won't be able to access many online health consultations, as suggested by Senator Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, until Medicare changes its policy on telemedicine.

"The RDAA has been advocating for specialist doctors to be able to charge Medicare for video consultations for patients living in rural and remote Australia, but at the moment only some limited telepsychiatry items are accessed in Medicare," Dr Maxfield said.

"Without the business model to support telemedicine and video consultation it is unlikely that the NBN will provide significant health benefits in rural Australia.

"We hope that as part of the implementation of the NBN the Government will ensure that doctors and other health professionals are able to access appropriate Medicare benefits for the provision of services using telemedicine and video consultations.

"These changes would improve the access that people in the bush have to health services, particularly from medical specialists who are not able to be located in every country town.

"It is also essential that workforce issues are addressed as a video player cannot substitute for being able to access a doctor or nurse in your local community," Dr Maxfield said.

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.

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