

MEDIA RELEASE



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Rural doctors provide Independents with ‘Ammo’

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) written to the three Independents MPs who are expected to hold the balance of power in the next Federal Parliament. Dr Nola Maxfield, RDAA President, has outlined the actions that can be taken either by a Gillard or an Abbott Government to address the substantial doctor shortages in rural and remote Australia.

“We welcome the opportunity to work with the independents to ensure that Australians who live and work in the bush can access decent health care services in their local communities, Dr Maxfield said.

“Clearly the three Independent MPs are very concerned about the access that their constituents, and in fact anyone living in rural and remote Australia, have to health care services. They know that rural communities will no longer tolerate the poorer health status, the massive underspend on Medicare compared to cities, downgrading, closure and bypassing of hospitals, loss of local obstetric and after-hours services and having to travel hundreds of kilometres just to get basic medical care.

“The bush needs more doctors, more nurses and more hospital and aged care beds”.

The Strategy is simple and in the context of a \$1b per year underspend on rural health services it is cheap and it will save lives. The next government:

- needs to work to establishing a **National Rural Generalist training program** that will ensure rural Australia gets Australian trained doctors who are able to provide services in both rural general practice and in rural hospitals.
- must **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.
- Undertake a **review of hospital and medical infrastructure support** with a particular emphasis on rural hospitals and medical practices in small rural and remote communities. This review would quantify the investment required to ensure hospital and medical practices are able to provide services to the next generation of rural and remote Australians

The next Government must also ensure that Australians who live in rural and remote areas have access to fast broadband services so that they are able to not only use the internet for communication and e-commerce but also for e-health services such as video consultations with medical specialists and shared electronic health records.

Is it too much to ask that you be able to see a GP in less than 6 weeks or have your baby in the local hospital? The time has come for the rural independent MPs to take a stand to ensure that rural and remote Australians get the access to the health services those in the city take for granted.

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