

MEDIA RELEASE



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Is there an e-future for rural Australia?

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) is urging the independent MPs who will hold the balance of power in the next Federal Parliament to ensure that rural and remote Australians can access fast and reliable broadband services.

“In the recent National Rural Health Consumers Survey undertaken by RDAA and the National Rural Health Alliance, 66% of respondents said access to tele-health would benefit those living in rural and remote communities” RDAA President, Dr Nola Maxfield, said.

“Clearly there is very strong support for better broadband services in rural Australia and the opportunities presented by eHealth, eLearning, eBusiness, on-demand entertainment and video conferencing.

“However, if government and business are to build these applications and put in place the business models that support rollout of these services to the bush there needs to be certainty that the broadband infrastructure will support them.

“Like most people, rural doctors care little about technical issues and terms such as megabits per second, ADSL, fibre to the home, wireless and optical—what they want to know is that the service will be available, affordable and reliable, and that the ‘pipe’ will be big enough so the services will run effectively.

“Clearly there are very significant benefits for patients in being able to access services such as video consultations, and being able to ensure that critical information about their clinical conditions can be shared with their consent with the team of health professionals treating them.

“Rural doctors also need a fast and reliable broadband connection to be able to access patient records at remote clinics, hospitals and nursing homes.

“What also should not be overlooked are the benefits that health professionals can achieve through services such as eLearning and eBusiness. There are large numbers of medical students and junior doctors who can benefit from good access to eLearning services that will assist them in continuing to develop their skills and knowledge whilst experiencing the benefits of getting their ‘hands dirty’ in providing health services in rural communities.

“Many senior doctors can also benefit from eLearning by being able to access high-quality continuing education from the comfort of their practices and homes in rural Australia, meaning they will not have to leave their community as often to access this education and upskilling.

“eBusiness also offers many opportunities for rural practices and their patients. Being able to do business with Medicare electronically alleviates the need for patients to visit a Medicare office, and being able to share diagnostic images and results with other health providers will reduce duplication and costs to patients, government and practices themselves.”

Available for interview: Dr Nola Maxfield on 0418 335 344.

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RDAA works to improve access to doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and health services in rural and remote Australia. We are committed to building a workforce of highly skilled and motivated rural medical practitioners. This requires adequate training and proper incentives, remuneration and support (both professional and personal).