



## MEDIA RELEASE

...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

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### GP funding welcome but where's allied health care?

Rural communities will gain better access to GP services through initiatives announced in yesterday's Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook report, but Australia's peak rural health organisation asks: "Where are the important allied healthcare services to support this?"

The National Rural Health Alliance has welcomed the Government's announcement of \$33.5 million to improve access to GP consultations through telehealth, but stressed the need for nursing and allied health professions to be able to also claim on the Medicare Benefits Schedule for telehealth consultations with people in rural, regional and remote Australia.

"Rural and remote communities need access to a broad range of services to support the work that GPs do – primary care requires the input of a range of professionals including nursing, physiotherapists, psychologists, dieticians, social workers and occupational therapists among others," Alliance CEO, Mark Diamond, said.

"Much of the Government's MYEFO announcement of \$512 million is about primary healthcare – that provided by doctors – but remote and rural communities also need to and deserve the broad range of health services necessary to support the GPs.

"The lack of supply and distribution of most allied health professionals in remote and very remote areas means that services are just not available. Telehealth would enable these services to be accessible in much the same way as will now be possible with a GP consultation – that's what we need. It is already available for psychologists providing mental telehealth services – the government just needs to make telehealth available to the other professions as well.

"The MYEFO announcement will provide greater access to GP consultations in rural Australia through telehealth initiatives, and the new funding to improve GP servicing in residential aged care settings is also welcome.

"There is so much potential to improve access to health care for people in rural and remote areas. It is just so important to enable the latest technologies such as telehealth to bridge this gap."

Mr Diamond also welcomed the provision of tailored after-hours health services through Primary Health Networks and changes to the MBS to allow consumers to claim for a range of new health services.

"The bringing forward of additional home care packages and particularly the 30 per cent increase in viability and homelessness payments (totalling \$111.2m) will be of particular benefit to remote and Indigenous residential aged care providers in remote and isolated areas," Mr Diamond said.

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*The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia's peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.*