

11TH NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE PERTH 13—16 MARCH 2011



Rural and Remote Australia **The heart of a healthy nation**

Communiqué

16 March 2011

1100 reasons to put regional health at the heart of Government action

The 1100 delegates at the 11th National Rural Health Conference have agreed on a number of colourful conclusions which provide a positive way forward for the Gillard Government on health services in rural, regional and remote Australia.

The situation with Indigenous health is black and white: it remains the most important social challenge for the nation – and 70 per cent of this challenge is in rural and remote areas. A number of presenters provided reasons for the priority accorded to this challenge and updates on progress with it. Tom Calma, one of the founders and still joint chair of the Close the Gap campaign, was joined by other Indigenous leaders such as Colleen Hayward and Pat Dudgeon in urging the Government to continue its focus on health, educational and service challenges for Australia's Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. One of the particular focuses of Conference delegates was the need to reinvigorate work on Indigenous ear conditions which, like so many other conditions which blight too many citizens of Australia, is entirely preventable.

The Federal Budget may be in the red but Conference delegates still expect early action on some of their priority recommendations to the Gillard Government. Both the need of country people for special consideration and the political circumstance in which the Government finds itself suggest that regional health should be among the main beneficiaries of Julia Gillard's 'year of action'. In her address to the closing session, Nicola Roxon confirmed the Government's intentions to make this such a year. The people of rural and remote Australia will hope that this action will commence on a number of fronts in the May budget – helping people in rural and remote areas to be in the pink again.

The ALP should take a leaf from the Greens health policy and move quickly to improve oral and dental health particularly for people on low incomes, Indigenous Australians and those who live in rural and remote areas.



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Further contact

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Conference delegates acknowledged support for the Perth event from its major sponsors: the Western Australian Department of Health, the Federal Department of Health and Ageing and *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*. Special thanks were also provided to Hesta, sponsor of the Conference dinner and inspiration for the green and purple superheroes extravaganza.

The 11th Conference was characterised by quite overt political discussions about the consequences of action and inaction on rural and remote health by the Gillard Government. Even those delegates who may not have supported Gavin Mooney's and John Menadue's calls for outright citizens' revolution seemed to agree that if the Government will empower rural and remote people on health and wellbeing, they will be less blue.

Mauving forward:

Windsor and Oakeshott have provided the platform. The 11th Conference has outlined the way forward. It's up to the Gillard Government to lead the action required to improve health equity for rural and remote Australians.

Further information:

If you haven't already read it, the full Conference program is available at www.ruralhealth.org.au. An archeological record of the Conference is available on the Alliance's twitter site via the Alliance's homepage or at twitter.com/NRHAlliance. The complete set of Conference recommendations is also on the Alliance's website together with this communiqué and the priority recommendations.



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