Medicare Locals and the changing rural health landscape

Rural health care is changing at the frontline through the establishment of Medicare Locals and Local Hospital/Health Networks.

Medicare Locals are primary health care organisations bringing a new approach to local health services, creating links with local and regional hospitals and developing improvements to services provided in rural communities.

Out of the 61 Medicare Locals across the country, 26 have more than 50 per cent of their population in rural and remote areas.

Issues facing these organisations are different from those in metropolitan areas – how they provide after-hours services is a prime example. Rural Medicare Locals are working together to develop ways and means of addressing health services to improve the health of people living in rural and remote Australia.

A Rural Policy Forum at the National Rural Health Conference in Adelaide will give an opportunity for rural health organisations and professionals to learn about the changing landscape and develop relationships that will make their job easier. Topics to be covered will include:

- opportunities and barriers arising from changing funding models;
- options for the future; and
- how to support service integration in rural and remote areas.

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association, National Rural Health Alliance and Australian Medicare Local Alliance have a strong interest in optimising the links between Medicare Locals and Local Hospital/Health Networks. These three bodies are sponsoring this event and will commit to following through on actions agreed at the Forum.

The Rural Policy Forum: Supporting rural Medicare Locals
- When: Sunday, 7 April
- Where: Adelaide Convention Centre.
- The program: can be found at [http://nrha.org.au/12nrhc](http://nrha.org.au/12nrhc) (choose Program/Pre-Conference events) and more information on the Conference can be found at [www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)