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MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent action needed to address harmful drug use in rural communities

Rural and regional communities need an urgent boost in health and community services to address the increasing harm caused by over use of alcohol and other harmful drugs, according to the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA).

The release today of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report, '[Alcohol and other drug use in regional and remote Australia: consumption, harms and access to treatment](#)', confirms that rural and remote communities bear the brunt of the harmful effects of over consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

Mark Diamond, NRHA CEO, said the AIHW report confirms the need for an urgent injection of health and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in rural and remote communities.

"The report highlights the unacceptable burden of disease from alcohol and harmful drug use in the bush. Remote and very remote areas had more than double the incidence of disease compared to major cities," Mr Diamond said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Director of Policy Trish Hepworth says the report shows that regional communities consume alcohol at much higher rates, which leads to the disproportionate levels of alcohol-related harm they experience including cancers, domestic violence, suicides and road fatalities. "The underlying problem is that alcohol has never been more affordable, available or aggressively promoted as it is today," Ms Hepworth said.

Mr Diamond says the report is a wake up-call for policy and decision-makers. "There are real issues here about access to services that country people experience – and it is not only treatment services for people with drug and alcohol dependency issues but also the prevention and early intervention programs that are so important," he said.

"Our upcoming National Rural Health Conference in Hobart later this month (24-27 March) has a number of health experts focusing on this very problem. Our health professionals and researchers know all too well that the remote and rural communities are severely disadvantaged in relation to services to assist people with drug and alcohol addiction," he said.

"Over one thousand health experts from rural and remote communities across Australia will be at the conference, discussing solutions to the serious health inequalities in the bush and calling for action to deliver equal health care services to people in these communities."

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