



**WEDNESDAY May 8, 2019**

## **No detail yet on health policies for rural Australia: NRHA**

A report out today showing higher levels of risky drinking in country areas compared with cities illustrates why political parties claiming to care for rural Australia must spell out what they are offering on rural health this election, the National Rural Health Alliance says.

NRHA CEO Mark Diamond said the 7 million people living in rural, regional and remote Australia have heard significant health announcements from the two major contestants – the Coalition and Labor - but are in the dark about how these policies will improve their health outcomes.

He was speaking in the wake of a report out today that showed a higher percentage (20%) of people in rural, regional and remote communities typically consume six or more standard drinks on a single occasion compared with 14% in major capital cities.

The Annual Alcohol Poll 2019: Attitudes and Behaviours report was commissioned by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. It shows that people outside cities are more concerned about alcohol-related problems associated with excess drinking including, alcohol-related road accidents, violence, crime, child abuse and neglect, and harm to unborn babies from exposure to alcohol in utero.

“If there’s more risky drinking and greater levels of concern about its harmful impact in rural areas, then where is the statement from our major contestants in this election that addresses this difference and their commitment to do something about it,” Mr Diamond said.

“It’s typical. We know and political parties have known for a very long time that people in rural, regional and remote areas carry 1.3 times the burden of illness, that preventable hospital admissions are up to five times higher in rural Australia and for every 100,000 people, 11 more will die every day in country areas than in cities.

2.

“Yet our political leaders for the most part refuse to spell out exactly how their health policies will play out in country areas. What percentage of the funding will be delivered there? Do the policies add extra funding to get the services they’re offering rebates on out to rural, regional and remote areas?”

“You can promise the world but unless you have a plan for overcoming the challenges of distance and inaccessibility, then rural Australia will be no better off.”

Mr Diamond said that, to date, the Greens were the only party that had issued a stakeholder statement specifically on rural health.

“The NRHA is Australia’s peak body for rural, regional and remote health and has 37 member organisations that represent people living and working across rural Australia. Our role is to provide policy advice to decision-makers. We are required to know and understand the problem. Equally, we are required to know the solutions. Our Election Charter identifies these.

“We now have the incumbent Government claiming record expenditure on regional health and a commitment to more doctors and nurses but where is their commitment to the NRHA charter which we know will make the difference?”

“We have identified the need for 3000 additional allied health professionals, 3000 additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners and much more. It’s all in our Charter. Will the major parties commit to this?”

“We want the major parties to run a rural lens over their policies and spell out exactly how their initiatives will make a difference to the improving the health outcomes experienced by people in rural areas. It’s time for the silence among the major parties on rural health this election to be broken.”

The NRHA’s Federal Election Charter specifies four key areas an incoming Federal Government must address to help rural Australians get healthier and live longer. (Details at [www.ruralhealth.org/election19](http://www.ruralhealth.org/election19))

Today the NRHA will contribute to a national pre-election Twitter Festival on health at #AusVotesHealth.

**Media Enquiries:** Mark Diamond  
Chief Executive Officer  
0428 817 090