



## MEDIA RELEASE

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

**May 3, 2019**

### Rural health ignored in election debate

Australia's peak body for rural health is dismayed at the lack of focus on rural health issues in the election debate on health at the National Press Club in Canberra yesterday.

"It's fair to say that the health needs of over 7 million people were totally ignored in this debate," National Rural Health Alliance CEO Mark Diamond said.

The Alliance represents 37 health peak member organisations – all of which have a deep concern for the unacceptable health outcomes experienced by people living in rural, regional and remote Australia.

"Why is it that we have 28% of the population experiencing 1.3 times the total burden of disease and yet successive governments don't give it priority and they certainly didn't in yesterday's national debate. Where was the focus on rural health?"

Last month more than 1,100 delegates voiced their concerns at the [15th National Rural Health Conference](#) in Hobart.

"They said that Indigenous health, access to health care, research and the need for a new National Rural Health Strategy were critical areas for an incoming government to address. Labor has committed to developing a new rural health strategy and we welcome this but we heard nothing on this or any of these other points in yesterday's debate.

"The situation is now reaching crisis point. We just don't have sufficient workers in rural and particularly remote areas to meet the health needs of the population. People are dying as a result.

"We have some areas in Australia that do not have access to basic services. The Royal Flying Doctor Service has identified 15 regions that do not have access to psychological services because the psychologists just aren't there.

"What sort of world do we want to live in when the disparity in access to timely, appropriate and affordable health care is so disproportionate to need?

"Suicide rates in rural Australia are 40 per cent higher than in metropolitan areas yet less than half the funding to address this is distributed there. What is happening here?"

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“To date the Greens are the only party to have issued a specific statement on what they plan to do for rural health and we commend them for that.

“The lack of focus on rural health is just so disappointing – we know that Catherine King represents a regional seat. We know that Greg Hunt’s electorate borders on an outer metropolitan area.

“There is no excuse for them – they know the disparity in access to health care experienced by rural Australians. They know. We call upon them to commit to what the sector is saying about the health of people in country areas. Commit to the Alliance platform.”

At the very least we need:

- An additional 3000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners
- Increased funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (Labor has committed some funds for this)
- An additional 3000 Allied Health Professionals
- Trials created in 20 rural and remote sites to test for the best workforce models
- A community grants program that communities can apply to for funds for better digital infrastructure so they can access healthcare online
- Medicare rebates for online or telehealth consults to people in outer regional, remote and very remote areas
- A special Mission for Rural Health created in the Medical Research Future Fund that is allocated a share of the fund proportionate to the population in rural Australia (28% = \$360m)
- A commitment to endorse the Uluru Statement and establish a Makarrata Commission for the sake of the nation’s wellbeing

These are set out in the National Rural Health Alliance’s 2019 Election Charter. (See [www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19))

“Both Mr Hunt and Ms King need to get these on the public agenda before the election.”

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