



**May 9, 2019**

### **Concern grows over lack of focus on rural health**

A chorus of concern over the major parties' failure to focus on rural health issues in the election campaign is growing, the National Rural Health Alliance says.

The peak body for rural, regional and remote health says the 7 million people living in rural Australia have been unable to discern what the big health policy announcements mean for them.

"Nor has there been a specific focus by the Liberal-Nationals Coalition and Labor on how access to health and preventive health services will be improved for them," CEO Mark Diamond said.

"We have a crisis in rural Australia – health outcomes have not improved and we continue to see measurable disparities in levels of access to health care and health outcomes.

"I note that yesterday the Australian Medical Association and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia raised similar concerns. They're concerned about the lack of a comprehensive plan to boost the rural medical workforce and staffing levels in hospitals and health services.

"The Greens have acknowledged that they recognize the significance of health care in rural areas and have issued a specific rural health statement which I commend them for.

"And yesterday, the Independent candidate for Indi, Helen Haines, joined the call for a boost to the allied health professions taskforce.

"Getting more allied health professionals into rural Australia is vital to address the chronic inequality of access to health services.

"This is a key part of the National Rural Health Alliance's 2019 Election Charter."  
(See [www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19))

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The NRHA is calling for:

- An additional 3000 Aboriginal Health Workers and practitioners
- Increased funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (Labor has committed some funds for this)
- An additional 3000 allied health positions
- 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

Mr Diamond said parties must show they can govern for all of Australia, not just cities.

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