Parties urged to continue big picture thinking on rural health

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has urged the Coalition and Labor to use the federal election campaign to continue to ‘think big’ on strategies to deliver a future rural health workforce for Australia.

RDAA says this would build on the welcome commitment by both sides of politics to invest in a future Rural Generalist doctor workforce for Australia.

“Our key message to the major parties is to be brave and commit to major reform that will address the maldistribution of doctors and other health professionals across rural and remote Australia - don’t just tinker at the edges with piecemeal initiatives” RDAA President, Dr Adam Coltzau, said.

"The $62.2 million in funding announced by the Coalition to fast-track the rollout of the National Rural Generalist Pathway for Australia was a game-changer for rural and remote communities."

"The fact that the Coalition has committed to fund the Pathway - and Labor has also committed to do so - shows that our political parties are capable of big picture thinking beyond the three year election cycle."

"This is strongly welcomed."

"The Pathway will deliver more of the next generation of doctors to rural and remote communities with the skills required by those communities."

"These doctors will not only provide GP services, but they will provide a wide range of other services ranging from obstetrics, anaesthetics and general surgery through to non-procedural services like advanced mental health, Indigenous health, palliative care and geriatric care."

"The federal election provides the major parties with an important opportunity to make real and lasting change in the bush, in improving access to rural health services."

"We now have the beginnings of a high impact rural medical workforce initiative, thanks to the National Rural Generalist Pathway. This will need further funding down the track, but its rollout is now assured."

"It would be great to back this up with other big picture initiatives that support a more even distribution of the medical workforce into those rural and remote communities where access to healthcare is poor."

"These initiatives need to be significant, not just pre-election tinkering."

"But they need not cost a huge amount of money, and in many cases they will save dollars."

"They include:

- A rural Medicare loading applied to all rural medical consultations and services, to help rural patients to better afford local healthcare and encourage more doctors (GPs and specialists) to provide services in the bush.

- Improvements to the General Practice Rural Incentives Program (GPRIP) to encourage more doctors to work in the bush, by providing support payments to rural doctors that reflect not only the remoteness of the location in which each doctor is working but also the level of skills and extent of services that the doctor is delivering.

- A revamped Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund that can support rural health services and general practices that have a track-record in training rural doctors to increase their capacity to train more."
"Local access to rural healthcare is a big issue for rural Australians when they go to the ballot box.

"They know that they pay the same tax rates as their city counterparts, and they expect to have just as much of a right to a local doctor and local hospital.

"The major parties have made a big step forward in putting their support behind the National Rural Generalist Pathway.

"We hope to see more of this big picture thinking benefitting rural Australia during the election."

A high resolution photo of Dr Adam Coltzau can be found via this link: https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/182

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