



...healthy and sustainable rural, regional and remote communities.

Federal Budget: Rural health support welcome, but more to be done

7 October 2020

The peak body for rural health in Australia today welcomed the increased investment in health in the 2020-21 federal budget, but warned there was more to be done to ensure that people in rural, regional and remote Australia have the same health outcomes as their city counterparts.

“We’re pleased to see a number of targeted measures to improve rural health as part of the Stronger Rural Health Strategy,” said National Rural Health Alliance CEO Dr Gabrielle O’Kane.

“We welcome the expansion of Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program infrastructure, which will help more students train to be medical professionals in rural areas.

“The \$3.3 million for new primary care models in New South Wales is also a good first step, but we want to see these place-based models rolled out in more rural areas across the country as well.

“The \$125m program to improve access to clinical trials in rural areas looks promising and we look forward to finding out more detail from government about how this program will work.

“It’s also good to see funding confirmed for the extension and expansion of the office of the National Rural Health Commissioner, as well as the extension of telehealth services for six months.

“More broadly, more support for mental health across the country is welcome but it will be important to ensure that rural areas get their fair share of the funding – which historically hasn’t been the case.

“Expanding access to psychological services under the Better Access scheme is a good step as well, but unless that’s coupled with measures to address workforce issues in rural areas then it won’t necessarily mean better access for people in these areas at all.

“It is disappointing that we didn’t see more investment in preventive health in this year’s budget. Spending money on preventive health is one of the best ways to improve health outcomes and saves money in the health budget overall.

“We are also disappointed that we haven’t seen a more permanent boost to JobSeeker. The old \$40 a day rate of JobSeeker was too low and meant that too many people in rural areas were living in poverty and weren’t able to afford things like fresh food. Now should have been the time for the Government to commit to a permanent increase.”

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The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.