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MEDIA RELEASE

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

RURAL AUSTRALIA - DON'T OPT OUT

Australia's peak body for rural and remote health is urging all country people to embrace My Health Record - an online summary of their health information.

National Rural Health Alliance CEO Mark Diamond says while country people can opt out of My Health Record from today, he implores them not to.

"Simply put, My Health Record can save lives."

"Australians living in rural and remote areas are more likely to end up in an emergency department from a heart attack, car accident or diabetic coma," he said.

"If they're unconscious, and the medical team doesn't have access to their health history, the team may not be able to provide life saving care," Mr Diamond said.

Country people are 25% more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease. They are 40% more likely to die from diabetes, and they are five times as likely to die from a road accident in remote areas.

"If you live outside a major city, you have less access to health services, and are more likely to delay getting medical treatment. That means you're more likely to end up being hospitalised," Mr Diamond said.

"A My Health Record means that all your important health information is at the fingertips of your doctor, nurse or surgeon," he said.

The National Rural Health Alliance represents 35 national organisations working across the rural and remote health sector. Members include the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), RACGP Rural and the Country Women's Association of Australia.

A My Health Record will automatically be created for all Australians by year's end, unless they opt out. The opt out period begins today and runs for three months until Monday October 15.

Mr Diamond acknowledges recent reports of privacy risks associated with online health information.

"There is always a risk with online information. But the Alliance is satisfied that the Australian Digital Health Agency is using the most robust security measures to safeguard people's health records, and the risk associated with My Health Record is small."

"I ask all country people to balance that small risk against the considerable advantages of My Health Record. There is simply no good reason to opt out," Mr Diamond said.

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