



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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rural and remote Australia priority on tackling overweight, obesity and smoking

“Rural and remote Australia must be the priority areas for national and local action to tackle high rates of overweight, obesity and smoking,” National Rural Health Alliance CEO, David Butt, said today.

“Today’s [Healthy Communities](#) reports from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) provide further evidence of the disparities in health and wellbeing between the 7 million people who live in regional, rural and remote Australia, and those who live in metropolitan areas,” Mr Butt said.

“The facts show that, among the 31 Primary Health Networks (PHNs) across Australia, the eight PHNs with the highest rates of overweight and obesity were all recorded in regional and rural locations.

“On obesity alone, five regional and rural PHNs had the highest rates, while on smoking rates they made up the top seven.

“This aligns with substantial evidence over considerable time that people living in regional, rural and remote Australia have worse outcomes than their metropolitan based colleagues.

“The further you live from a metropolitan area, the worse your health outcomes become with lower life expectancy and an increased burden of disease – due to factors such as overweight, obesity and smoking rates.

“Access to vital services is poorer, and expenditure on health services falls short.

“There is a \$2 billion gap in annual spending on health and wellbeing in rural and remote areas compared to metropolitan areas – that’s about \$300 for each person.”

Mr Butt joined with the Australian Medical Association in calling for a national prevention campaign to tackle overweight and obesity.

“The Alliance supports national and local approaches to prevent overweight and obesity but the overwhelming evidence is that the biggest impact can occur in rural and remote communities because of the high rates in those communities,” Mr Butt said.

“Once a person is overweight or obese, many people find that it is extremely difficult to lose weight and to keep that weight off.

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

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“It is far more effective to focus on preventing weight gain and in turn preventing diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some forms of cancer.

“A proper prevention strategy can save Australia substantial costs and improve the quality of life of people.

“This includes tackling the problems of food security where people, particularly in rural and remote Australia, find it difficult to access healthy nutritious food, or afford the higher prices in these areas.

“What they can access and afford are foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, including sugary drinks, all of which contribute to the higher rates of overweight and obesity in rural and remote Australia.”

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