MORRISON’S MINISTRY – WHERE IS RURAL HEALTH?

The Ministerial line-up announced by Prime Minister Scott Morrison has a glaring omission.

At a time when great swathes of rural and remote Australia are experiencing the impact of devastating drought conditions, including significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of our communities, the key portfolio of Rural Health is nowhere in sight.

The new Morrison Ministry does not include a Minister for Rural Health. That key responsibility was on Friday held by the Deputy Leader of the Nationals, Senator Bridget McKenzie. By Sunday it was gone.

‘It was only on Friday last week that rural health sector stakeholders met in Canberra, for a meeting convened by the (former) Minister for Rural Health, to discuss the issues and solutions for achieving better health outcomes for rural Australia’, National Rural Health Alliance Chair, Tanya Lehmann said.

‘The key message of the Roundtable meeting was very clear. The health and wellbeing issues faced by rural and remote Australia cannot be addressed using market-driven solutions that work in the cities.’

‘We need a genuine, high level commitment from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to deliver a new National Rural Health Strategy that will address the unacceptable gap in health outcomes for rural Australians. This is not the time to be relegating Rural Health to the back burner’.

‘We call upon the Morrison Government to demonstrate it is fair dinkum about improving the health and wellbeing of rural Australians by reinstating Rural Health as a Ministerial portfolio and committing to the development of a National Rural Health Strategy’, Ms Lehmann said.

The Alliance welcomes the re-appointment of the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Federal Minister for Health and the Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Health, and acknowledges their continuing contribution to addressing the health and aged care needs of all Australians. We also welcome Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie’s contribution to regional services, sport, Local Government and decentralisation, however we remain concerned that rural health, as a separate Ministerial portfolio has been overlooked.

‘While we understand Minister McKenzie will continue to be responsible for Rural Health — and we very much look forward to continuing to work with her — we are concerned that this critical area will no longer have its own dedicated portfolio’, Ms Lehmann said.

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

The National Rural Health Alliance is the peak body for rural, regional and remote health. The Alliance has 35-member organisations representing the peak health professional disciplines (eg doctors, nurses and midwives, allied health professionals, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists, paramedics, health students, chiropractors and health service managers), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health peak organisations, hospital sector peak organisations, national rurally focused health service providers, consumers and carers.

Some of the worst health outcomes are experienced by those living in very remote areas. Those people are:

- 1.4 times more likely to die than those in major cities
- More likely to be a daily smoker, obese and drink at risky levels
- Up to four times as likely to be hospitalised due to diabetes complications
- 1.7 times more likely to commit suicide

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