

## Few benefits for rural health in Federal Budget

The peak national body for rural health has welcomed \$62m to train doctors in rural generalist practice, but says tonight's budget has largely failed to address a critical shortage of allied health professionals for 7million people living outside metropolitan Australia.

National Rural Health Alliance CEO Mark Diamond said the budget was a mixed bag for rural health.

"We've had a big and much-needed focus on medical services and we welcome that but comprehensive health care needs paramedics, pharmacists, nurses and a whole range of other health professionals too. There was nothing in the budget to address this critical workforce shortage or to get them where they are so badly needed," Mr Diamond said.

"And we were disappointed to see that major population health issues - obesity, maternity services, stillbirths or a national alcohol prevention strategy, all of which are well overdue for investment - were missing in the budget."

Boosts for mental health including \$15m for indigenous suicide prevention, \$114.5m for Adult Mental Health Centres, \$263m for additional Headspace network sites and an \$11.5m National Mental Health Workplace Initiative (\$11.5m) sounded good but there was no indication these funds would be spent in the bush.

Some good news items for rural areas include \$9.6m for alcohol and other drug treatment and support services, an expansion of the rural health outreach fund to increase access to pain management specialist services and train providers (\$4.3m); a new Ambulatory Care Centre in Alice Springs (\$25m); and other local service improvements including a new CT scanner for Bowen Hospital, an Early Psychosis Youth Centre in Darwin and new radiology, pediatric and chemotherapy services on the Bass Coast.

"We welcome an additional \$160m for Indigenous medical research. It's long overdue and we support it being targeted at rheumatic heart disease, and blindness and deafness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth," Mr Diamond said.

Last week's National Rural Health Conference in Hobart called for governments to invest at least the same in addressing the allied and other health worker shortage as has been expended over many years in medicine.

"We still have regions in Australia where access to physiotherapy, dietetics, psychology, occupational therapy and podiatry services is severely restricted or even non-existent. How can that be?"

**Media Enquiries:** Mark Diamond, Chief Executive Officer  
0428 817 090

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