Will Australia’s long term health plan benefit rural Australia?

The National Rural Health Alliance commends the Health Minister Greg Hunt’s inclusion of a stronger rural health sector in ‘Australia’s Long Term National Health Plan.’

The Plan clearly articulates the Government’s commitment to bring an additional 3,000 extra doctors and 3,000 additional nurses to rural Australia over 10 years, and the Alliance encourages the Government to consider increasing an equivalent number of allied health workers.

It is often the allied health workforce that contributes to preventing chronic disease, reducing hospital readmissions and improving quality of life, so it is critical that Government sets targets for increasing the allied health workforce in rural, regional and remote communities.

“The Plan also needs to offer suitable incentives to attract and retain allied health staff, in the same way that incentives are offered to GPs,” said Dr Gabrielle O’Kane, CEO of the National Rural Health Alliance.

The Alliance welcomes the Government’s commitment to mental health and preventive health, providing Primary Health Networks with $1.45 billion over three years to commission mental health services at a regional level.

“While the Government has committed to flexible healthcare delivery models, including telehealth, we need to ensure Medicare rebates are available to allied health practitioners and Aboriginal Health Practitioners delivering mental health and preventive health services in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia,” said Dr O’Kane.

“The Alliance will continue to advocate for those living in rural and remote parts of Australia to ensure they get the same level of intensive follow-up, personalised care after a suicide attempt or crisis, as those living in urban areas,” added Dr O’Kane.

“A missed opportunity in this long term health plan has been the omission of a strategy to address climate and health. Much of the country is in the midst of a severe and prolonged drought, with rural, regional and remote communities experiencing high rates of poor mental health and suicide, yet a long term commitment to a plan to address these links is missing,” said Dr O’Kane.
The National Rural Health Alliance comprises 41 national organisations with an interest in improving the health and wellbeing of the 7 million people in rural, regional and remote Australia. The Alliance is meeting in Canberra in September to provide advice and solutions to key Members of Parliament on optimal ways to improve health outcomes for rural people.

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