MEDIA RELEASE

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Road safety: a life and death issue in rural and remote Australia

People in rural and remote areas are significantly over-represented in the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Country people are three times more likely to die as a result of a transport accident than their city cousins.

In National Road Safety Week (3-10 May), and at every other moment, the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) would remind everyone of the risks involved in driving on country roads.

Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that people living outside the major cities have nearly twice the rate of serious road-related injury as those living within them. Tragically, the death rate in transport-related accidents for young men aged 20-24 years living in the country is nearly four times higher than it is for those in the same age group in the city. These startling statistics can be attributed to a combination of factors, including vehicle and road characteristics, transport habits, perceptions of risk and law enforcement rates.

Much can be done to improve road safety in rural and remote areas. By improving the physical features of country roads, such as roadside hazards and road markings, expanding public and community transport options, and delivering education programs tailored to the needs of rural and remote people, travel on country roads can be made safer.

"Most importantly, drivers, passengers, cyclists and pedestrians need to be constantly aware of the risks - and vigilant," said Gordon Gregory, CEO of the NRHA.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 aims to reduce the annual number of deaths and serious injuries on Australian roads by thirty per cent by 2020. If this is going to be met, road safety in rural and remote areas needs to be a particular focus for policy makers, transport and traffic agencies, and researchers.

“Better roads in rural and remote areas do more than save lives and improve road safety. They provide better access to essential services, for instance enabling people to get to primary care and rehabilitation services more easily. Patient retrievals and the supply of goods and services become safer and quicker, and health professionals can get to isolated areas more readily.”

The NRHA recently made a submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Inquiry into Aspects of Road Safety in Australia. It can be downloaded at http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/document/submission-rural-and-regional-affairs-and-transport-references-committee-inquiry-aspects

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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.