

National Rural Health Alliance e-forum 2 December 2009

In this issue:

- * Creative Ageing seminar - catch the action on our website
- * Preventive health agency can work for the bush
- * Rural GP heads strong team on health reform in the bush
- * Multi-purpose services and PATS critical for rural health
- * RAMUS Scholarships now open
- * Dementia Community Support Grants - Round Three
- * Protocols for the delivery of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Indigenous communities
- * AIHW Reports
- * Federal Government News
- * Rural Health on the ABC
- * RDAA News
- * Article in 'Rural and Remote Health'
- * What's On
- * Contribution and subscription information and disclaimer
- * Full text of "Creative Ageing seminar - catch the action on our website"
- * Full text of "Preventive health agency can work for the bush"
- * Full text of "Rural GP heads strong team on health reform in the bush"
- * Full text of "Multi-purpose services and PATS critical for rural health"

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Creative Ageing seminar - catch the action on our website

Those who may have missed the public seminar *'From creative ageing to end-of-life in rural and remote Australia'*, which was an integral part of this year's *CouncilFest*, can still catch the action on our website. Simply access <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au> and click on the left hand column hotlink "Public Seminars". This will also be a valuable site for those who did attend but are keen to recap the salient points made by an impressive list of keynote speakers.

The Alliance statement is at

<http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/mediareleases/creative%20ageing%20seminar%20now%20on%20website.pdf> and is reproduced below.

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Preventive health agency can work for the bush

Establishment of the National Preventive Health Agency has been identified by Council of the NRHA as one of the priorities for practical action to improve health in rural and remote areas. The Alliance wants to see the Agency progressed with urgency so that it can implement specially targeted preventive programs for 'at-risk' groups, including people in rural and remote communities. The Alliance statement is at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/mediareleases/mr-23-11-09.pdf> and is reproduced below.

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Rural GP heads strong team on health reform in the bush

Tamworth GP Dr Jenny May has been re-elected unopposed to serve a second term as Chair of the 29-member National Rural Health Alliance. The Alliance announcement is at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/mediareleases/mr-19-11-09-office%20bearers.pdf> and is reproduced below.

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Multi-purpose services and PATS critical for rural health

The right of country women to give birth at a local hospital - and for the elderly to die peacefully in familiar surrounds - was part of a powerful pitch by the National Rural Health Alliance to MPs and Senators at Parliament House this week. The Alliance statement is at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/mediareleases/mr-19-11-09-mps-pats.pdf> and is reproduced below.

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RAMUS Scholarships now open

Applications are now open for the Rural Australia Medical Undergraduate Scholarships (RAMUS) Scheme, funded by the Australian Government and designed to encourage medical students with a rural background to pursue a medical career in rural, regional or remote Australia.

Successful applicants will receive un-bonded scholarships worth \$10,000 a year while completing a standard medical degree at their chosen university. The RAMUS Scheme is open to medical students from rural and remote areas, with demonstrated financial need being one of the criteria for ranking those who apply.

"The RAMUS Scheme supports a total of 550 ongoing scholarships and up to 120 new scholarship places are available in 2010. Applications must be submitted by 5pm on 18 January 2010," said RAMUS Manager, Susan Magnay.

The RAMUS page of the Alliance website has all the details - see <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/scholarships/?IntCatId=7>

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Dementia Community Support Grants - Round Three

On 24 September 2009, the Minister for Ageing, the Hon Justine Elliot MP announced \$1.5 million for Round Three of the Dementia Community Support Grants.

You may wish to consider applying for a Grant. The key priority areas for Round Three of the Dementia Community Support Grants include:

- * promotion and/or awareness raising;
- * early intervention and risk reduction; and
- * providing local support for families and/or carers.

The Department would also encourage you to circulate this notice to any organisations you feel may be interested in applying for Dementia Community Support Grants, particularly those that focus on the above priority areas or targeting culturally and linguistically diverse,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or regional, rural and remote communities.

One off funding of up to \$50,000.00 (GST Exclusive) per successful application is available. Grant applications close at 2pm Thursday 3 December 2009.

For more information on the Dementia Community Support Grants - including how to apply please go to <http://www.health.gov.au/tenders> or send an email to dementia@health.gov.au

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2010 MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS NOW OPEN

Join or renew your *friends* of the Alliance membership for 2010 before Christmas to receive a friends' sunhat and pin. Download the membership form at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/friends/friendsmembership.pdf> or via the *friends* page of the NRHA website at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/friends/?IntCatId=4>

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Protocols for the delivery of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Indigenous communities

These guidelines have been written to fill a significant gap in resources available to Primary Health Care and Mental Health services. Inspiration for the document rose from the recognition of the need for a key practical resource and tools to guide training, management and clinical and community practice in Wellbeing and Mental Health to complement the physical health-oriented practice manuals and guidelines. Audits conducted with remote area health services in Far North Queensland demonstrated the need for more support to the Primary Health and Mental Health Care Workforce to gain confidence, ensure continuity and integration of effort, engage families and show accountability in this area of service delivery to assist in meeting National Mental Health Standard.

There has been a major surge in national interest for resources to assist services to embed both social and emotional well being and mental health support into Indigenous primary health care frameworks. The document aims to be responsive and flexible in recognizing needs, translating academic understanding and integrating experience of all those involved. It has attracted attention nationally as it appears to be among the first of its kind as an education and training document as well as a practice guide to primary mental health care pathways. The authors and users anticipate that the protocols will be continually improved allowing new ideas and tools, adjustments for a changing workforce and new opportunities.

<http://www.uq.edu.au/nqhepu/index.html?page=110805&pid=0>

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Partyline is the newsletter of the National Rural Health Alliance. Partyline enables communication within the rural community and invites contributions about issues relating to health and wellbeing in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia. Subscription is free. All back copies of Partyline are available at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

To submit contributions or request subscription, email partyline@ruralhealth.org.au

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CLICK TO GIVE FREE MAMMOGRAMS

<http://www.thebreastcancersite.com/clickToGive/home.faces?siteId=2>

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AIHW REPORTS

Meeting the needs of Australia's most vulnerable - how do we measure up?
The AIHW biennial report, *Australia's welfare 2009*, shows how we measure up, particularly when it comes to children and young people, families, those with disability, carers, the homeless and older Australians.

Among the key points are:

- * In 2006, 15% of Australian children lived in jobless families, with the proportion substantially higher for children in one-parent families (52%)
- * Too many children are subject to violence and abuse-around 34,300 children were on care and protection orders in 2007-08, up 37% from 2005
- * The number of people with the highest level of disability is projected to increase to around 1.5 million Australians by 2010, and almost 2.3 million by 2030. Higher levels of disability tend to be more prevalent in areas of relative economic disadvantage
- * Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to need help with core daily activities because of disability
- * Although homelessness is widely regarded as a metropolitan issue and inner city areas do have high rates of homelessness, there are also high rates of homelessness in regional and remote areas.

Media statement at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/mediacentre/2009/mr20091117.cfm>

Full publication at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10872>

AIHW Access online magazine, issue no. 26, 2009

Feature on rural health. Reports released by the AIHW have shown that Australians who live in rural and remote communities generally have poorer health than their city counterparts.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/access/200911/>

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**COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH
e-BULLETIN - 23 November 2009**

This fortnightly bulletin is distributed by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (through its Link people and website) to provide you with information on what's happening at the CRCAH and on issues of interest to Aboriginal health research.

<http://www.crcah.org.au/>

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The Australian Journal of Rural Health is a multidisciplinary journal, which aims to facilitate the formation of interdisciplinary networks to build and advance rural practice for all health professionals. Get published in the *Australian Journal of Rural Health*! The Journal welcomes short reports and letters to the editor as well as review articles, original research articles and clinical perspectives. For useful tips on submitting your manuscript, read the FREE editorial, *How to get published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health*.

Manuscripts can be submitted online at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ajrh> Manuscript Central or posted to AJRH. The Australian Journal of Rural Health is published on behalf of the National Rural Health Alliance by Blackwell Publishing Asia Pty Ltd 155 Cremorne Street Richmond Vic. 3121 Tel: +61 (0)3 9274 3100 Fax: +61 (0)3 9274 3101 E-mail: melbourne@johnwiley.com.au

December 2009 issue now available. Contents include:

- Editorial - Small rural emergency departments are not simply cut-down large urban emergency departments
- Original Articles
- Emergency department performance at a small rural hospital: An independent in-depth review
- Does routine psychological screening of newly diagnosed rural cancer patients lead to better patient outcomes? Results of a pilot study
- Pharmacy students' intention to practise in a rural setting: Measuring the impact of a rural curriculum, rural campus and rural placement on a predominantly metropolitan student cohort
- Secondary prevention of osteoporosis post minimal trauma fracture in an Australian regional and rural population
- A seven-year retrospective analysis of students entering medicine via a Rural Student Recruitment program in Western Australia
- Mapping oncology services in regional and rural Australia
- Factors associated with population risk perceptions of continuing drought in Australia
- Promoting positive coping skills for rural youth: Benefits for at-risk young people
- Book Review - Enhancing Patient Care - A Practical Guide to Improving Quality and Safety in Hospitals
- From the Journal Associates
- National Rural Health Alliance meets with Minister for Rural Health
- Combined voice: Royal College of Nursing, *Australia's* rural nursing and midwifery faculty

Further information at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/ajr>

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LIFELINE INFORMATION SERVICE - 1300 13 11 14

Your Rural Mental Health Information Service Lifeline's Information Service is a rural mental health information service. Information provided includes: referral to services and web sites, printed material and a range of self help resources. The self-help resources focus on practical steps to help promote mental health in a range of areas. For information and copies of resources call or visit <http://www.lifeline.org.au/info-service> and further information

is available at infoservice@lifeline.org.au and <http://www.lifeline.org.au>

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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT NEWS

A stronger NTER for lasting change

The Government will repeal all NTER laws that suspend the operation of the RDA to help build real and lasting change in Indigenous communities and end the unacceptably high levels of disadvantage.

<http://www.alp.org.au/media/1109/msia251.php>

Deaths, Australia, 2008

(ABS Cat 3302.0)

There were 2,500 deaths registered in Australia in 2008 where the deceased person was identified as being of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both origins (Indigenous).

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3302.0?OpenDocument>

New Audit Reports on Indigenous Programs

Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner, announced the publication of two new performance audit reports completed by the Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) in the Department of Finance and Deregulation. Indigenous Community Volunteers Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV) is a not-for-profit organisation that operates by invitation from Indigenous communities and organisations, and aims to link these with volunteers willing to share their skills in all kinds of areas. The evaluation found that the ORIC has primarily focussed its efforts on placing individuals in corporate governance training programs. http://www.financeminister.gov.au/media/2009/mr_772009.html

Rural and Regional Aged Care Workers to Benefit from \$2.6 Million Training Initiative

Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot announced \$2.6 million to provide training for 4000 staff working in rural and regional aged care homes. Minister Elliot made the announcement in her opening address to the Aged Care Association Australia (ACAA) annual conference in Melbourne. The Support for Aged Care Training (SACT) short courses focus on specialised areas such as wound management, diabetes care, medication management, falls prevention and manual handling.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr09-je-je127.htm?OpenDocument&yr=2009&mth=11>

Health Infrastructure Funding for Remote Communities

Australia's rural and remote health service providers are now able to access funding for essential health infrastructure and equipment in a new grant round. The round is the fourth under the \$46 million National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP). The Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery, Warren Snowdon, said the NRRHIP was a competitive grant program with the aim of providing health infrastructure and equipment to improve health care in rural and remote areas.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr09-ws-ws057.htm?OpenDocument&yr=2009&mth=11>

Call for Regional Cancer Centre bids

The centres are part of the Government's plan to enable people with cancer who live in rural and regional areas to deal more effectively with cancer treatment challenges, and to live longer with a better quality of life.

<http://www.alp.org.au/media/1109/msewrheag150.php>

Agreement to deliver improved Indigenous communications

Better communications services will help close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage across Australia, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, said.

http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/103

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AUSTRALIAN ORGAN DONOR REGISTER ONLINE

The Australian Organ Donor Register is Australia's only national organ and tissue donor register and serves as a lifeline to the people on the organ transplant waiting lists. Register online at <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/aodr/register.jsp> to be an Australian Organ Donor now!

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BUSH SUPPORT SERVICES (formerly Bush Crisis Line) - 1800 805 391

The Bush Support Services Line is a 24 hour confidential telephone support service for workers, and their families, who work in health related services in remote and isolated situations. It is staffed by qualified psychologists with remote and cross cultural experience, is toll free and available from anywhere in Australia. For more information:

<http://www.bss.crana.org.au>

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RURAL HEALTH ON THE ABC

(See <http://www.abc.net.au/health/healthyliving/yourhealth/ruralregionalhealth/>)

Bring a GP to Australia, get \$3,000

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is offering thousands of dollars to people who entice doctors from overseas to work in Australia. The AMA wants to find another 500 doctors to work in general practice around the country, especially in regional areas.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/26/2754063.htm>

Surgeon shortage threatens regional health

A critical shortage of general surgeons in emergency wards across the country is threatening the 7 million Australians living outside metropolitan areas.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/25/2753706.htm>

Indigenous communities starved of fresh food, Govt told

A Parliamentary Committee has called on the Federal Government to do more to ensure that Indigenous Australians have access to fresh food.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/17/2745338.htm>

Call for healthier foods in remote Aboriginal stores

The Federal Government is being urged to do more to improve the supply and affordability of fresh foods in remote Indigenous communities.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/17/2744894.htm>

AMA warns regional health services at risk

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has warned several health services in regional Western Australia are at risk of becoming dysfunctional due to a lack of funds.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/17/2745255.htm>

Indigenous kids' lung problems 'not followed-up'

A senior Northern Territory doctor says the federal intervention documented serious lung problems in thousands of Indigenous children but not enough resources have been provided to follow-up the issue.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/16/2743718.htm>

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RDAА NEWS

Spotters Fees not the way to attract doctors

27 November 2009

http://www.rdaa.com.au/uploaded_documents/RDAА%20-%20Spotters%20fees%20-%2027Nov09.pdf

Doctors commend Area Health Service for prompt action on Coolah Hospital concerns

16 November 2009

http://www.rdaa.com.au/uploaded_documents/RDANSW%20-%20Coolah%20Hospital%20off%20bypass%20-%2016%20November%202009.pdf

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ARTICLE IN 'RURAL AND REMOTE HEALTH'

'Building rehabilitation capacity in rural in New South Wales'

Rehabilitation services as we know them originated during World War II with the aim of returning injured servicemen to active duty. These days, when rural residents must undertake hospital-based rehabilitation, a worthy goal is to return them to a facility close to home. This novel project analysed the introduction of rehabilitation services in two small Australian rural hospitals. As a bonus to interesting and specific conclusions, this study also offers insight into the process of change in the rural inpatient setting.

<http://www.rrh.org.au/articles/showarticlenew.asp?ArticleID=1113>

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CURRENT ISSUE OF eMJA

(Available at <http://www.mja.com.au/>)

Rapid Online Publication

Hospitalised adult patients with pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza in Melbourne, Australia - 16 November 2009

A pandemic response to a disease of predominantly seasonal intensity - 16 November 2009

Current issue: 16 November 2009

From the Editor's Desk: Daylight saving: a dark side?

Editorials

The role of general practitioners in managing and treating hepatitis C

Building health literacy in Australia

Optimising the therapeutic use of oxygen in Australia

Conference Report - Grasping the initiative in health policy research and reform

Research

Risks associated with low functional health literacy in an Australian population

Screening for hepatitis C virus infection in methadone-maintained mothers and their infants

Treatment disparities and effect on late mortality in patients with diabetes presenting with acute myocardial infarction: observations from the ACACIA registry

A classification of hospital-acquired diagnoses for use with routine hospital data

Health Care

Variability in the rate of prescription and cost of domiciliary oxygen therapy in Australia

Tobacco use and measuring nicotine dependence among urban Indigenous pregnant women

Clinical Update - Bridging the communication gap between public and private radiology services

Viewpoint - Whole-of-hospital response to admission access block: the need for a clinical revolution

Notable Cases - "Paradoxical" immune-mediated reactions to *Mycobacterium ulcerans* during antibiotic treatment: a result of treatment success, not failure

Lessons from Practice - A disastrous sequela of a missed ureteric stent

Letters

Rates of hospitalisation for acute respiratory illness and the emergence of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus in the Hunter New England Area Health Service

Timing of bronchiolitis hospitalisations and respiratory syncytial virus immunoprophylaxis in non-metropolitan Western Australia

Impact of Australian celebrity diagnoses on prostate cancer screening

Who is responsible for the care of patients treated with warfarin therapy?

Stop taking warfarin? No way!

Adverse outcomes of labour in public and private hospitals in Australia

Timing of transfer for pregnant women from Queensland Cape York communities to Cairns for birthing

Patterns of mortality in Indigenous adults in the Northern Territory, 1998-2003

Close the Gap: ask the experts

Why health reform?

Obituary - Charles Ronald Lucas

Book Reviews

Ethics and law revisited

Preventing cardiovascular disease

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'Skilling up for Oral Health' - Oral Health Workforce Forum

2 December 2009, 9 am to 4.30 pm

Stamford Plaza, Adelaide

Are you a community services or health employer interested in the future of the Oral Health skills for your Workforce?

'Skilling up for Oral Health' is a free forum being held in Adelaide on 2 December 2009 to discuss strategies to extend oral health skills to the broader oral health community services and health workforce. This forum represents a unique opportunity for diverse groups to meet, discuss and debate the opportunities for improved oral health outcomes across the community through workforce development.

An outstanding range of speakers will explore the challenges and opportunities for growing our workforce. Presentations will explore and discuss areas of:

- * A population health approach, with a strong focus on promoting health and prevention
- * Education and training for oral health skills
- * Strategies to extend oral health skills to the broader oral health community services and health workforce

View the Preliminary Program at <https://promo-manager.server-secure.com/ch/cgzf0q/266533/94331my22.html>

Register online at <https://promo-manager.server-secure.com/ch/cgzf0q/266534/9433111bm.html>

Call Lisa Woodward, Events Coordinator, t: 02 9270 6626, f: 02 9270 6601, lisa.woodward@cshisc.com.au

or Bronwyn Walker, Project Coordinator, t: 02 9270 6635, f: 02 9270 6601, bronwyn.walker@cshisc.com.au

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Subject: International *Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress*

From: Elisia Dowling edowling@parks.vic.gov.au

With the increasing recognition of the value of nature to human health and wellbeing worldwide, Parks Victoria will host the inaugural International *Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress* at the new Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Australia from 11-16 April 2010.

This will be a unique opportunity to bring together delegates from all relevant sectors (i.e. planning, community development, physical and mental health, tourism, climate change, education, recreation, ecology and park management) to explore how we can take better advantage of the way nature significantly contributes to our wellbeing and broader societal benefits.

We are seeking proposals under the following themes: Healthy Communities, Healthy Parks, Healthy Participation, Healthy People and subthemes.

In addition to the partners displayed on the website, the support of the World Health Organisation, United Nations World Tourism Organisation, US Federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and the Australian Federal Government Department of Health & Ageing is being sought.

<http://www.healthyparkshealthypeoplecongress.org>

Elisia Dowling
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International Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress April 11-16, 2010
Parks Victoria
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Ph: (03) 8680 2138 Fax: (03) 9613 4722 M: 0428 598 322

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Healing Our Spirit 2010

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and researchers are advised to start planning now for Healing Our Spirit Worldwide The Sixth Gathering, which is due to take place on the island of Honolulu in Hawaii from 3 to 10 September 2010. The goal of Healing Our Spirit Worldwide (HOSW) is to celebrate the diverse and unique cultural strengths, knowledge and talents of Indigenous peoples around the world, with a particular focus on successes, best practices and common issues in health, healing and addictions.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health is a proud supporter of and committed participant in the gathering, which will be hosted by native Hawaiian healthcare organisation Papa Ola Lōkahi (<http://www.papaolalokahi.org>).

For more information:
Maria Halkitis - Contract Manager, 08 8943 5020
Mick Gooda - CEO, 0409 688 403

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Rural Medicine Australia 2010

Scientific Forum: Call for abstracts

The 2010 national conference and scientific forum of ACRRM and RDAA will be in Perth in October. The scientific forum is a significant part of the conference and is held every second year. There will be a call for abstracts early in the new year. Almost 300 people attended Rural Medicine Australia 2009.

<http://www.acrrm.org.au/news/rural-medicine-australia-2010>

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The 11th National Rural Health Conference will be held in Perth on 13-16 March 2011.

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is published fortnightly. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at grovesc@winshop.com.au (do not "reply" to this email - send contributions to grovesc@winshop.com.au). Contributions received by the Friday of publication will be included in the e-forum.

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. As such, the Alliance does not control postings and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Alliance. Nor do postings necessarily reflect the views of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au

Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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Media Release

27 November 2009

Creative Ageing seminar - catch the action on our website

Those who may have missed the public seminar *'From creative ageing to end-of-life in rural and remote Australia'*, which was an integral part of this year's *CouncilFest*, can still catch the action on our website. Simply access www.ruralhealth.org.au and click on the left hand column hotlink "Public Seminars".

This will also be a valuable site for those who did attend but are keen to recap the salient points made by an impressive list of keynote speakers.

Among them were three prominent academics from the US and Britain as well as senior Australian figures. The electronic wizardry of YouTube will allow you not only to hear but watch the speakers deliver their addresses as if you were there.

"The NRHA Public Seminar was once again an important component of this year's *CouncilFest*," said Gordon Gregory, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Susan Perlstein, Director of Education and Training at the National Centre on Creative Ageing in Washington DC; Mike White, Senior Fellow in Arts in Health at the Centre for Medical Humanities at the University of Durham; and Alison Clough, Director of the Pioneer Projects and Looking Well Centre at Bentham in the United Kingdom, are all leaders in the field of creative ageing."

"So, too, are Margret Meagher of Arts and Health Australia, Joan Hughes of Carers Australia, Donna Daniell of Palliative Care Australia and Rosemary Young of Frontier Services."

"Also available is a presentation by Chairperson of the Alliance, Jenny May, of some of the key characteristics of older people in rural and remote Australia."

"We thank all of our speakers for their efforts and trust those who may have missed all, or some part of it, will appreciate the opportunity of witnessing it "live" via the website."

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Media Release

23 November 2009

Preventive health agency can work for the bush

Establishment of the National Preventive Health Agency has been identified by Council of the NRHA as one of the priorities for practical action to improve health in rural and remote

areas. The Alliance wants to see the Agency progressed with urgency so that it can implement specially targeted preventive programs for 'at-risk' groups, including people in rural and remote communities.

"We believe the Bill should be passed by the Senate as soon as possible," said Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May. "There is no doubt that, as a nation, we need to focus more on keeping people healthy as distinct from treating illness."

About one third of Australia's burden of disease is preventable, much of it relating to the chronic diseases associated with cigarettes, alcohol and obesity.

National prevention programs targeting these risk factors have been successful in urban areas, but less so in rural and remote areas. For example, rates of smoking in the major cities decreased by more than 15 per cent between 1995 and 2004-05, whereas over the same period the rates in regional and remote areas appear not to have changed.

In the same period, the incidence of a sedentary lifestyle decreased by 5 per cent in the major cities, while in regional and remote areas it *increased* by about 5 per cent.

The establishment of a National Preventive Health Agency was recommended by both the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission and the National Preventative Health Taskforce. Governments should be encouraged to follow up as quickly as practicable on important proposals from health reform reviews.

Most interested parties believe the need and purposes for the new Agency have been well established. The belief that 'form follows function' is not a valid argument for holding up expansion of the nation's work on preventive health.

"A stronger emphasis on health promotion is good policy for the nation and its impact can be even greater in rural and remote areas where people have poorer levels of health, face greater risk factors and have fewer services," Dr May said.

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Media Release

19 November 2009

Rural GP heads strong team on health reform in the bush

Tamworth GP Dr Jenny May has been re-elected unopposed to serve a second term as Chair of the 29-member National Rural Health Alliance.

Other office holders elected at the 18th Annual General meeting of the NRHA held in Canberra on the weekend include Dubbo-based remote area nurse Sophie Heathcote who retains the position as Deputy Chair, Pauline Wardle from Frontier Services in Alice Springs as Treasurer, and Gordon Stacey from the WA Country Health Service as incoming Secretary.

Other Directors for the next year are pharmacist Terry Battalis, from Larrakeyah in the Northern Territory; Liz Dodd, GP from Griffith in NSW; Nicole O'Reilly, an occupational therapist from Darwin; Lyn Pearson, Executive Director of the Council of Ambulance

Authorities; Alice Springs dentist Bruce Simmons; and Queensland-based Heather Wieland, National President of the Country Women's Association of Australia.

"I am delighted to have the support of such a strong and dedicated Board," said Dr May. "At a time when the opportunity for reform has never been greater, we look forward to leading the Alliance in making a real difference for the health and wellbeing of the people of rural and remote areas."

Also at the AGM, Council voted to admit the Rural Health Education Foundation as the Alliance's 29th member.

While in Canberra, Council members from around Australia spent a day in Parliament House, including meetings with Ministers Roxon and Snowdon and Shadow Minister Dutton. Health Minister Roxon described the Alliance as holding a unique place among health stakeholders and acknowledged the Alliance's ability to "mesh the needs of consumers and professionals".

"The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will meet in Queensland next month. The Alliance has made a number of submissions to advance the health reform process and we are confident the rural voice will be heard when COAG decides on which parts of the health reform agenda it plans to progress," said Dr May.

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Media Release
19 November 2009

Multi-purpose services and PATS critical for rural health

The right of country women to give birth at a local hospital - and for the elderly to die peacefully in familiar surrounds - was part of a powerful pitch by the National Rural Health Alliance to MPs and Senators at Parliament House this week.

"These are important human drivers, as is the timespan between the beginning and end of life," said Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May.

"In effect the Alliance has called for a moratorium on the further closure of country hospitals. Instead, we call for reinvestment in these vital services, with increased emphasis on the formation of multi-purpose teams and integrated health services capable of providing acute, primary and aged care service for people in small rural centres."

The multi-purpose service model has been developed over 15 years and has proved to be effective and valued by local communities. It is time for its principles and practices to be extended to integrated care in a broader range of rural towns and communities.

The Alliance also called for the earliest possible action by Governments to develop a nationally consistent system for patient assisted travel schemes. The schemes should provide a realistic level of financial support for country patients and carers to travel away from their homes for a wider range of essential health services.

Among those who heard the call for improved integrated local services were Health Minister Nicola Roxon and Warren Snowdon, the Minister for Indigenous, Rural and Regional Health.

The Alliance repeated its call for the Commonwealth to assume policy and funding responsibility for all publicly-funded primary care. This would mean one level of government having clear accountability for community health, drug and alcohol services, family and child health, aged care assessments, Home and Community Care and school and public dental programs.

"There are currently nine separate health systems operating in Australia with limited cooperation between them and disjointed information systems," said Dr May.

"The Alliance supports the establishment of regional Primary Healthcare Organisations to plan and organise the delivery of primary care. These should reflect natural 'communities of interest' and have regard to geographical identity, transport and health services connections in rural areas."

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