

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum – 4 July 2003

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GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES FURTHER RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS UPGRADE

The Government has announced its response to the Regional Telecommunications ('Estens') Inquiry. The package involves expenditure of \$181 million over four years on further expansions of mobile phone coverage in small towns and along highways, a National Broadband Strategy including a subsidy for broadband take-up in rural and remote areas, and continuation of the satellite handset subsidy for those without mobile phone coverage. Other initiatives include a formal requirement on Telstra to upgrade its digital radio concentrator systems, to provide minimum line speeds of 19.2 kbps, and to maintain its presence in regional Australia. The Government emphasised that these measures will proceed regardless of further privatisation of Telstra, although the legislative aspects of the package were in fact included with the Telstra privatisation legislation. The Government's statement is available at http://www.dcita.gov.au/Article/0,,0_1-2_1-4_115488,00.html

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PARTYline is the official newsletter of the National Rural Health Alliance. Keep up to date with rural health policy information and good news stories on living and working in the rural health community. Available online on <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au> or receive a hard copy by emailing michele@ruralhealth.org.au

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From: Ron Smith <ronsmith@bigpond.net.au>
Subject: Grief Support Service For Bush

The Grief Education Centre has launched a twenty four hour on line support service for people wanting to assist family and friends during difficult periods of grieving. The information is appropriate for electorate offices, emergency workers, politicians, council aged care workers, news media and the general community.

In rural areas the devastation of fires floods and drought can have a major impact on individuals and families. The use of the internet has overcome the tyranny of distance making this program available for regional and rural communities throughout Australia.

This system is being made available nationally. To find out how it operates just register and you will automatically be sent information within a couple of seconds. More information is at <http://www.grief.org.au/subscription.html>

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LONG HOURS FOR DOCTORS IN REMOTE AREAS

Medical practitioners in remote areas work an average of 49 hours per week, or 4 more hours per week than their capital city colleagues, according to figures released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). "Medical Labour Force 2000" shows that, generally, the number of medical practitioners per 100,000 population (practitioner rate) decreased and hours worked per week increased with decreasing population density.

Medical practitioner rates ranged from 307 doctors per 100,000 population in capital cities to 94 per 100,000 in 'other rural areas' (i.e., rural areas other than rural centres). The practitioner rate for specialists in large rural centres (101 per 100,000 population) was on a par with that for capital cities (99). The provision of doctors in rural and remote areas was augmented by 1,353 practitioners based in more populated regions who also practised in a second, less populated region.

At a national level, there were 51,106 practitioners employed and practising in medicine in Australia in 2000, an increase of 8% since 1995. The average age of employed practitioners was 46.5 years, and just under one-third (30%) were women.

The AIHW report is available at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm?type=detail&id=8882>

Health Minister Senator Patterson said that the report shows that Federal Government initiatives to attract and retain doctors are working, noting that the medical labour force is increasing at a rate faster than population growth and the average hours of work have decreased overall since 1995 which reflects a trend for doctors to balance family and work commitments. Her statement is available at <http://www.health.gov.au/mediarel/yr2003/kp/kp03111.htm>

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BUSH CRISIS LINE - 1800 805 391

Bush Crisis Line is a twenty-four hour confidential telephone support and debriefing service for multi-disciplinary remote and rural health practitioners and their families. 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.crana.org.au/pandp_bcl.html

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RURAL HEALTH IN NSW BUDGET

The NSW Government will deliver the largest ever health budget to rural and regional NSW this year, spending \$2.6 billion on health services. NSW Minister for Health Morris Iemma said the 2003-04 health budget for rural and regional NSW was an increase of \$244 million on last year or more than 10 per cent. Mr Iemma statement is available at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2003/June/24-06->

03rr.htm and the Budget Paper on Budget highlights for rural and regional NSW is at <http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/bp03-04/regbud/pdf/rbh.pdf>

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OECD DATA SHOW HEALTH EXPENDITURES AT AN ALL TIME HIGH

OECD countries are spending record amounts on health care, largely due to the rising cost of pharmaceuticals and the diffusion of modern medical technologies. Latest available data show that OECD countries spent record amounts on health care in 2001 - an average 8.4% of their gross domestic product, up by three tenths of a percentage point from 2000.

Australia the OECD average with 8.9% of GDP spent on health. The United States continues to top the OECD ranking for overall healthcare spending at \$4900 per capita or 13.9% of GDP in 2001 - more than twice the OECD average of \$2100. Though more than half of this is private funding, public spending per capita in the United States is also high. The OECD report is available at <http://www.oecd.org/EN/document/0,,EN-document-12-nodirectorate-no-12-42365-12,00.html>

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The “Australian Journal of Rural Health” is a refereed journal with a national and international reputation for quality scholarship. Its focus is multi-disciplinary and it includes articles of interest to general practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, health administrators, universities and rural health units. Reduced rates apply to members of some organisations. For more information see <http://www.blackwell-science.com/ajr>

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Extract from ABC Health-Updates
(Health-Updates is a weekly alert about recent ABC health coverage now available online. Subscription information is at <http://www.abc.net.au/health/maillinglist.htm>)

NEW: AUSTRALIAN HEALTH MAP

This week sees the launch of the new Health Map, a comprehensive look at health in Australia, state by state. With vital health statistics for each state and territory, information about where to find health resources like hospitals and community services, and links to ABC local radio health stories, the Health Map will become a valuable resource for all Australians. The site is packed with useful links and interesting information...take a peek today. <http://www.abc.net.au/health/healthmap/default.htm>

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Interested in becoming a “friend” of the Alliance? Become more involved with the work of the Alliance by becoming a “friend”. “friends” support the Alliance by being an integral part of the Alliance’s policy and evaluation process. They also receive other benefits. For more information on membership see <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

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A NEW REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Federal Government has launched a new Regional Partnerships program to make it simpler for communities to get Government backing for their regional development ideas.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, said that Regional Partnerships integrates all of the Government's key regional funding programs, except Sustainable Regions, into one simple program.

"We will spend an additional \$61.8 million on Regional Partnerships over the three years from 2004-05 to 2006-07," Mr Anderson said.

The new Regional Partnerships program amalgamates Regional Solutions, Regional Assistance, Rural Transaction Centres, Dairy Regional Assistance and the structural adjustment programs for the Wide Bay-Burnett, Namoi Valley, Weipa and South-West Forests region of Western Australia.

For more information go to <http://www.regionalpartnerships.gov.au>. The Ministers' statement is at http://www.ministers.dotars.gov.au/ja/releases/2003/june/joint6_2003.htm

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at grovesc@winshop.com.au or use the eforum contribution box at the NRHA website, <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

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 view of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au.

This issue is going to 2,236 email addresses. Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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