

incentives are to be provided - with recommendations expected to the Minister soon following the rural health workforce audit.

In its submission to that workforce audit, the Alliance distinguished the demand for health professionals from the demand for health care, and argued that the emphasis should be on the latter. In a time of serious and growing global shortages of professionals, a balanced outcome in Australia between demand and supply will require changes on several fronts. Where workforce numbers are concerned, the nation needs to ensure that a fair 30 percent of the graduates from health science courses (not just medicine) are enthused about and trained for practice in rural and remote areas. The number of new medical graduates will rise from about 1,350 to 2,500 a year in the next five years. It is to be hoped that other health professions soon have increases in undergraduate numbers of a similar order of magnitude. For this to happen, major new investment will be required. Meanwhile, the Alliance is seeking immediate action on a higher education contribution scheme (HECS) reimbursement program for nursing, allied health and dentistry/oral hygiene; a national rural and remote undergraduate placement scheme for health professionals; and an improved and more uniform patients' assisted transport scheme.

Australian Journal of Rural Health

There is now a freely-available virtual issue of the AJRH on Indigenous health. For access, go to <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/ajr>

Election of new friends Advisory Committee friends of the Alliance will soon be calling for nominations from people for the friends Advisory Committee and Chair of friends. Nominations will be open to all 2008 financial members, who will also be invited to vote for state representatives. If you have not rejoined for 2008 there is a membership form on the friends page of our website at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>. Details of the election process and a nomination form will be provided with the next edition of Partyline which will be out by the of March.

Australian Journal of Rural Health

The April issue of the AJRH will soon be available online to subscribers. It will be a special thematic issue on public health. The AJRH is published by Blackwell Wiley and information can be accessed at www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/ajr

Partyline No 31, March 2008

The next edition of Partyline will be out soon. Contributions can be sent to the Editor at partyline@ruralhealth.org.au. Electronic versions of Partyline are available in the 'Publications' section of our website at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/publications/?IntContId=57&IntCatId=6>

Fortnightly eforum / Monthly Alliance E-news To subscribe or contribute to the fortnightly eforum go to <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au> - see link in the bottom left hand corner. eforum is a moderated newsletter open to anyone and is in addition to this monthly Alliance E-news. It is not limited to information from the Alliance but contains a range of information such as media releases, news and conference information from whomever has contributed to it. It is sent only to those people who have specifically subscribed to it from the front page of our website - it is not sent to our in-house mailing list. There is an

The appointment of a Commonwealth Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer will increase the strength of the advice to the Australian Government on nursing and midwifery matters at a time of much anticipated change in the health sector. It will also help maintain the balance between the health professions in a way that reflects the reality of health care - particularly in rural and remote areas.

The Alliance is pleased with the Government's decision on this matter. Nurses and midwives play a key role in health and aged care services and are the largest health professional group in all areas. Their distribution is thankfully not as skewed towards the major cities as is the case for general practitioners, medical specialists and dentists, although there are still significant nursing and midwifery shortages in the health workforce overall.

The appointment recognizes the increasing importance of the Commonwealth in relation to policies and programs that have an impact directly on nursing and midwifery. The Australian Government is the leading player in increasing the number of nurses and midwives available to the health and aged care sectors, for instance through providing extra tertiary places and re-entry programs.

If new policy frameworks are agreed between the Commonwealth and the States, and anticipated improvements made in the funding of the health system, it will be essential to have high level advice on the implications for nurses and midwives. For example, such changes as these will impact on scope of practice and job satisfaction.

It is very good that the nursing and midwifery professions will now have a stronger voice in the Department in Canberra - as well as on Australia's behalf in international forums.