

National Rural Health Alliance E-forum 21 November 2008

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CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON RURAL MATERNITY SERVICE CLOSURES

The peak non-government body for rural and remote health has called for a moratorium on the closure of maternity services in rural and regional communities.

"The fact that rural birthing options are becoming increasingly limited is of great concern to families and rural communities and ought to be a matter of concern to the health sector, the Treasury and society at large," the National Rural Health Alliance said in a submission to the Rudd Government's National Maternity Services Review.

The full text of the Alliance statement is at

http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/mediareleases/mr%20maternity%20services%20moratorium%20_2_.pdf and is reproduced below.

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COMMUNICATION SURVEY 2008

The Alliance is currently considering the ways in which it disseminates information and we would appreciate your views on how you access it. The online survey at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/survey/?IntCatId=38> should only take 2-3 minutes to complete. We greatly appreciate your assistance

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10th NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
17-20 May 2009, Cairns, Qld

Bumper interest shows Cairns the place to be in '09

Over 400 abstracts have been received for the presentation of papers, posters and workshops at next year's 10th National Rural Health Conference in Cairns.

The number reflects the high level of national interest in the health of the people of rural and remote Australia.

The papers have come from all parts of Australia from people with a wide range of backgrounds - as consumers, managers, practitioners and researchers. Each one provides a different perspective on health outcomes and the health services available - including the way they are delivered and their current availability in rural and remote areas.

As part of its ongoing commitment to the Closing the Gap campaign, and as with previous National Rural Health Conferences, the conference committee will give special consideration to papers submitted by Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. First-time presenters will also get special support at the conference.

"It's hard to tell whether the extraordinarily high level of interest is due to the poor state of health in the bush, or to the major opportunities for strategic reform that are now beginning to open up in rural and remote areas," said Conference Convenor Owen Allen.

Either way, following their assessment by an independent panel, about 120 of those who submitted abstracts will gain a spot on the busy four-day conference program, which starts on 17 May 2009 at the Cairns Convention Centre.

"We are considering ways to ensure that those whose abstracts narrowly miss out can remain involved in the Conference," said Mr Allen.

Themes for the conference in Cairns are:

- * overcoming Indigenous and non-Indigenous disadvantage by achieving greater health equity between country and city
- * constructing a resilient response to both political and environmental climates
- * demanding community consultation on health issues
- * collaborating to make health programs 'fit for service' and
- * celebrating the successes and failures of 20 years in rural and remote health.

"Even with the program yet to be finalised, it promises to become a rural health showcase for the nation," Mr Allen said.

Further Contact:

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Marshall Wilson - Media: 0419 664 155

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

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RDAA STATEMENTS

RDAA submission to the Maternity Services Review

18 November 2008

http://www.rdaa.com.au/uploaded_documents/RDAA%20Submission%20Maternity%20Services%20Nov%202008.pdf

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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

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December 2008 issue now available. Contents include:

Editorial - Mental health academics in the university departments of rural health: Roles and contributions

Suicides on farms in South Australia, 1997-2001

Young driver restrictions: Does the evidence support them?

Cervical cancer risk factors and predictors of cervical dysplasia among women in south-west Nigeria

Mental health of farmers in Southern Queensland: Issues and support

Critical health infrastructure for refugee resettlement in rural Australia: Case study of four rural towns

Lung cancer: An exploration of patient and general practitioner perspectives on the realities of care in rural Western Australia

General practitioners' management of patients with mental health conditions: The views of general practitioners working in rural north-western New South Wales

Expanding the role of paramedics in northern Queensland: An evaluation of population health training

A rural/urban comparison of the roles of the general practitioner in colorectal cancer management

Short Reports

Improving inpatient management of community-acquired pneumonia in remote northern Australia

Do patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease receive smoking cessation advice and interventions in rural Crete? Report from a medical audit study

Mothers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes towards their obese and overweight children living in rural north-west of New South Wales

Doctor and physician assistant distribution in rural and remote Texas counties

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

Students and researchers keen to learn more about the changing facts surrounding Indigenous health are encouraged to consult the 2008 'virtual issue' of the prestigious *Australian Journal of Rural Health*. Freely available through the website <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/ajr> readers can access 22 key reports published in the last decade covering some of the most pressing topics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

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RHEF UPCOMING PROGRAMS

(From <http://www.rhef.com.au/upcoming-programs/>)

Tuesday 25 November, 8 pm

821b: Deadly Steps: Indigenous Youth
Channel 4

Friday 28 November, 12.30 pm

821b: Deadly Steps: Indigenous Youth
Channel 23

Tuesday 9 December, 8 pm

823: The Journey Back: Rehabilitation After Stroke
Channel 4

Friday 12 December, 1.30 pm

823: The Journey Back: Rehabilitation After Stroke
Channel 23

Tuesday 16 December, 8 pm

611: Clinical Toxicology: Bites and Stings
Channel 23

Friday 19 December, 12.30 pm
611: Clinical Toxicology: Bites and Stings
Channel 23

Tuesday 27 January 2009, 8 pm
901: A is for Asthma: Managing Asthma in Primary School Kids
Channel 4

Friday 30 January 2009, 12.30 pm
901: A is for Asthma: Managing Asthma in Primary School Kids
Channel 23

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Partyline, the Newsletter of the National Rural Health Alliance, is available in hard copy and online - go to <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>, then to Publications, then Partyline.

If you would like to subscribe to *Partyline* please email your contact details to nrha@ruralhealth.org.au Subscription is free.

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STATEMENTS BY THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED
HEALTH ORGANISATION

Men need to be part of the solution says National Aboriginal health meeting
13 November 2008

<http://www.naccho.org.au/Files/Documents/Media%20Release%20NACCHO%20AGM%20male%20summit%2013-11-8.pdf>

Peak Aboriginal health body demands action on Closing the Gap
12 November 2008

<http://www.naccho.org.au/Files/Documents/Media%20Release%20NACCHO%20AGM%20CTG%2012-11-8.pdf>

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Join *friends* of the Alliance now for 2009 and get discounted registration for the 10th Conference in Cairns in May. People who pay the *friends* fee after 1 September are members for the whole of the following calendar year. *friends* members will also receive the updated CD 'Rural and Remote Health Papers 1991-2009' (due out in late 2009), connection with the Alliance's policy work and regular issues of the *Partyline* newsletter.

Above all, membership of *friends* gives you the opportunity to support the Alliance and its work.

The *friends* Advisory Committee is: Alicia Eaton (Vic), John Ferguson (Qld), Jane Fisher

(ACT), Janet Fletcher (NT), Pauline Glover (SA), Nigel Jefford (WA), Marie Lally (SA), Suzanne Little (Qld), Irene Mills (WA), Beth Smith (TAS), Janie Smith (NSW), Janet Struber (NT), David Templeman (ACT), David Thompson (Vic) and Robin Toohey (NSW). Members of the Committee are soon to elect a Chairperson, who will be a Member of the NRHA Council.

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RAMUS SCHOLARSHIPS - APPLICATIONS FOR 2009 ARE NOW OPEN

Apply online now! At <https://www.nrha.net.au/ei/rs.esp?id=84&scriptid=RAMLOGIN>
Applications close 5:00pm AEDST 19 January 2009. Late applications will not be accepted

To be eligible you must:

- * be an Australian citizen or permanent resident of Australia
- * have lived in an Australian rural area for a defined minimum period of time. A minimum of five consecutive years, or eight cumulative years from your fifth birthday up to the time you enter medical school
- * be studying full-time in an accredited Australian medical degree. You can apply for RAMUS if you are applying to study medicine or if you are already enrolled, and in any year of your medical studies. Accredited medical courses include both undergraduate and graduate-entry courses.
- * be a member of, or agree to join, your university's student rural health club

Further information at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/scholarships/?IntContId=14716&IntCatId=7>

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

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RURAL HEALTH ON THE WEB

Rural Health Care - USAC

This is the basic introduction page to the two audiences served by the rural health care program.
<http://www.usac.org/rhc/>

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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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EYE PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN ARE AS COMMON AS ALLERGIES AND ASTHMA - AIHW

Eye disorders are the most common long-term health problem experienced by children along with allergies and asthma, according to a report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The report, *Eye health among Australian children*, found there were more than 411,000 children with long-term eye disorders in Australia.

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had a similar rate of eye hospitalisations to other Australian children. But within that figure, hospitalisations for infections and eye-related injuries were more common among Indigenous children'.

The AIHW statement is at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/mediacentre/2008/mr20081107.cfm> and the full publication is at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10660>

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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.bushcrisisline.org.au>

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RURAL HEALTH ON THE ABC

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

ANF defends remote nurses

The Australian Nursing Federation says remote area nurses are a vital part of health care in remote communities, and work in cooperation with medical officers.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/20/2425448.htm>

ALCOHOL ABUSE STILL A PROBLEM IN NT (AM: 15/11/2008)

<http://abcmail.net.au/t/328803/614869/6162/0/>

INTERVENTION CONSEQUENCES (Background Briefing 16/11/2008)

While remote Aboriginal communities are safer, everyday living is more complicated. There's a \$600 cab fare to town, and then Centrelink has to approve toys for your kids. We visit Katherine in the NT for this report. <http://abcmail.net.au/t/328803/614869/911/0/>

NT anaemia rate in children 'unacceptably high': Fed Govt

The Federal Government says rates of anaemia in Northern Territory children are unacceptably high.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/15/2420649.htm>

Home-brew sparks Indigenous health worries

A Mount Isa health officer in north-west Queensland says more education is needed about the effects of poorly made home-brew on Indigenous people.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/14/2420062.htm>

Praise for SA's handling of rural suicide

The author of a new study into rural suicide says other states should learn from the way South Australia is helping its farmers.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/14/2420131.htm>

Rural doctors: Accreditation laws could lower skill levels

The Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) says a new law to nationalise the registration and accreditation of doctors has the potential to see skill levels drop.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/15/2420709.htm>

Anger over NT death forces nurses to leave community

Nursing staff in a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory have been forced to leave, after the death of a local man last week.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/200811/s2419669.htm>

Public airs anger over Pambula maternity closure

Supporters of a hospital on the New South Wales' far south coast have begun what they say will be a long fight to retain the facility.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/14/2419694.htm>

Medicos urge Fed Govt boost to Qld regional health funds

The RDAQ says the Fed Govt must increase its funding to help improve health services in rural and remote areas. The Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) says the State Government cannot be entirely blamed for a shortfall in funding for regional health services.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/13/2418214.htm>

Farmers much more likely to commit suicide: report

The suicide rate among male Australian farmers is almost 50 per cent higher than the average in rural communities, according to a study calling for better targeted efforts to treat depression.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/12/2418096.htm>

Intervention accused of ignoring seniors

The head of Frontier Services in central Australia has criticised the federal intervention for ignoring older Aboriginal people.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/12/2417307.htm>

Flying doctors feeling financial strain

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) says it is facing funding challenges as household budgets continue to tighten.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/12/2417255.htm>

Fears flight cuts will hurt health services

There are fears the axing of air services to six communities across western New South Wales will impact on health services.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/11/2416383.htm>

Desert conference praises Flynn's foresight

A paper presented at a conference on deserts has acknowledged the foresight of the pioneer of Australia's outback, Reverend John Flynn.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/200811/s2416333.htm>

Outback health services labelled Third World

A Mount Isa doctor says the level of health services in north-west Queensland is similar to that in the Third World.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/10/2415178.htm>

Planning underway for new rural medical service

Queensland Health says it is working to develop a new rural medical service to improve health services in the bush and attract more GPs to remote areas.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/07/2412837.htm>

Rural doctors push for staff

The SA Rural Doctors Association says the State Government needs to provide better support for regional health professionals as part of its country health plan.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/07/2412803.htm>

Another country health plan released

The South Australian Government has released another plan for country health services.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/06/2412004.htm>

Rural doctors warn of staff shortage under health plan

Rural doctors warn there will not be enough qualified staff to run regional hospitals under the South Australian Government's Country Health Care plan if there is not enough funding put into the health workforce.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/08/2414269.htm>

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APPLICATIONS ENCOURAGED FOR RURAL AND REMOTE HEALTH FUND

The Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development, Gary Gray, encouraged applications for

the Australian Government's health infrastructure fund for rural and remote communities. Mr Gray said the Australian Government allocated \$46million over four years (2008-09 to 2011-12) to the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program, which was announced by Health Minister Nicola Roxon in September. He said applications for the program, an amalgamation of the Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund and the Rural Private Access program, closed next month on 19 December.

http://www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/gg/releases/2008/november/gg015_2008.htm

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CURRENT ISSUE OF eMJA, 17 November 2008

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

From the Editor's Desk: Doctors as stars

Editorials

Reducing sudden death in young people in Australia and New Zealand: the TRAGADY initiative
Victoria's trauma care system: national implications for quality improvement

Conference Report

Quality use of medicines: what does it mean for you?

Research

A statewide system of trauma care in Victoria: effect on patient survival

Frequent attenders at emergency departments: a linked-data population study of adult patients

Long-term survival following chemoradiation for inoperable non-small cell lung cancer

Somatic symptoms, hypochondriasis and psychological distress: a study of somatisation in Australian general practice

Health Care

Folate awareness and the prevalence of neural tube defects in South Australia, 1966-2007

What has happened with neural tube defects and womens' understanding of folate in Victoria since 1998?

Intravenous potassium chloride prescribing and administration practices in Victoria: an observational study

Position Statement - Infants with chronic neonatal lung disease: recommendations for the use of home oxygen therapy

For Debate - Australian Government health advisory groups and health policy: seeking a horse, finding a camel

Preventive Health - Australia: the healthiest country by 2020

Diagnostic Dilemmas - Headache of a diagnosis: frontotemporal pain and inflammation associated with osteolysis

Snapshot - An unusual cause of dyspnoea

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RUDD GOVERNMENT: IMPROVING INDIGENOUS AGED CARE

The Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot has detailed the next stage of the Australian Government's \$46 million Indigenous Aged Care Plan.
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr08-je-je218.htm>

Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot announced an independent review of three Government aged care workforce initiatives in the Northern Territory.
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr08-je-je219.htm>

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NAIDOC Week celebrations for 2009 will be held from 5 to 12 July. Further information at
<http://www.naidoc.org.au/>

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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 view 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
12 November 2008
Call for moratorium on rural maternity service closures

The peak non-government body for rural and remote health has called for a moratorium on the closure of maternity services in rural and regional communities.

"The fact that rural birthing options are becoming increasingly limited is of great concern to families and rural communities and ought to be a matter of concern to the health sector, the Treasury and society at large," the National Rural Health Alliance said in a submission to the Rudd Government's National Maternity Services Review.

Across rural Australia an estimated 130 maternity centres have closed in the past 10 years. This is despite the fact that a healthy pregnancy, a birth that is managed with appropriate care and an

optimum beginning to life are key determinants of the long term health of every individual.

"Investment in maternity services yields high returns for individuals, families and the nation. The obverse is that poor prenatal and birthing experiences may impose costs for life and are likely to involve many in the health care sector who are not directly involved in maternity services," the submission said.

Titled *The Importance of Birthing in the Bush*, it backs the establishment of a National Maternity Services Plan and supports the philosophy that women be assisted to feel 'in control' not only in pregnancy, but in childbirth and during the postnatal stage.

Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May, said the submission makes a strong call for reinvestment in maternity services in rural areas. "A widespread network of maternity services would help sustain country hospitals as well as the rural, regional and remote communities that depend on their services," she said.

"The absence of nursing services is seen as a disincentive for people of child-bearing age to move to or remain in rural communities. Reduction in services impedes regional development, which has a consequent and long-term negative impact on rural health outcomes generally," Dr May said.

Other factors proposed for improved birthing in the bush include greater support for all health professions involved in maternity services, and the replication of models of birthing services that have already been shown to work well. The Alliance also called for the electronic retention of routine data collected during pregnancy, birth and in the first five years of life, and for a no-fault insurance scheme to reduce the cost to clinicians and taxpayers in the event of adverse outcomes.

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