

## Media Release

20 May 2009

### A fertile time for health reform

In the closing address to the 10<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference in Cairns today, the Minister for Health, Nicola Roxon, said she was excited to receive constructive ideas from delegates about what might be done to improve health outcomes for rural and remote Australians.

The Minister described it as “an exciting and fertile time for health reform, despite the difficult financial circumstances”, and said she looks forward to working with the sector in the coming year.

In addition to the financial challenge, the Minister identified a range of ongoing and well-known pressures on rural people and businesses. These, such as isolation and extremes of weather, as well as the poorer health status, provide the basis of the delegate expectations that their recommendations will receive serious consideration in Canberra. A total of 19 priority recommendations was agreed by delegates, the most important of which relate to the move to a single national health system with funds to be held and managed at the regional level.

Delegates agreed that only genuine engagement with communities at the regional level would see the sector meet its objective of equal health for people in rural areas.

A major focus at the Conference was on the social and economic determinants of health, with delegates arguing that the rural and remote health sector should be seen as “the best buy” for early investments in better ways of delivering health services.

The Conference also emphasised the impacts of climate change on the health of the seven million people living in rural and remote areas – as well as the opportunities it is likely to generate.

Other key recommendations related to the rapid adoption of new health professional roles and of a secure and effective system for individual electronic health records. The need for greater equivalence of incentives for all rural health professionals was affirmed at the Conference, including in relation to the Budget announcements.

The Conference communiqué, the priority recommendations and the full set of proposals from delegates in Cairns are available on the Alliance’s website.

#### Further Contact

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