



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

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Investment needed to bring e-health benefits to remote Australia

Technological advancements have the potential to bring significant health benefits for people in rural areas. But, according to the National Rural Health Alliance, there must be preferential investment in e-health capacity and implementation in rural and remote communities to ensure that these benefits are realised in the areas where people have poorer health and least access to traditional health services.

Alliance Chair, Jenny May, says specific plans must be established to meet the electronic information and communication needs for even the most remote Australians so they too can benefit from e-health.

“E-health is much more than telemedicine,” said Tamworth GP, Dr May.

“The World Health Organisation defines e-health as the combined use of electronic communication and information technology in the health sector. It is the means of providing the right health information to the right person at the right place and time in a secure electronic environment.”

“In a time of commitment to health reform, the Alliance has released a Position Paper on the rural and remote implications of a national e-health strategy.

“The Alliance is hopeful that the government will respond to some of the challenges facing rural health with a commitment to the early adoption of connective and integrative e-health projects which have the capacity to support rural health professionals to provide better care,” she said.

The Position Paper examines the rural potential of e-health in the current health reform agenda. It discusses the priorities and ten year roadmap outlined in the national e-health strategy endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers Council in December 2008 and proposes a contributory role for the Alliance.

“Adoption of e-health sits well with multidisciplinary team-based health care delivery and should be a part of a coherent national plan for rural and remote health,” she said.

The Position Paper recommends early investment in the adoption of individual electronic health records so that people in rural and remote Australia have their health information where and when they need it.

“A large and growing number of e-health projects are being developed in local regions, in primary and acute care settings and within the public and private sector.

“Rural people want to know about the systems already in use and share the experiences in designing and implementing them, including the pitfalls and the benefits, to minimise duplication and maximise progress. Privacy, confidentiality and medico-legal concerns also need to be acknowledged and addressed,” Dr May said.

“The Alliance will seek to be involved in setting key targets and requirements for quality improvements and for monitoring health system performance, an integral part of e-health solutions for rural and remote Australia,” Dr May said.

“Rural and remote communities are well placed and have a strong interest in leading the way to make e-health part of ‘business as usual’ for health care.”

Further Contact

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