



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

Media Release

12 May 2009

Rural health investments to tackle the challenge

Rural health programs, mainly for general practice, have received a welcome boost in the Budget despite the current tight fiscal environment. A new system for classifying towns as regional, rural or remote will be used as the basis for a range of continuing incentive programs that includes some important new ones. The revised system will see 2,400 additional doctors eligible for support – including some in places on the fringes of metropolitan areas.

“Added weightings for remoteness in the revised system is a sound idea given that both health status and access to health services deteriorate with increasing remoteness,” said Dr Jenny May, Chair of the National Rural Health Alliance.

“It’s great to see the Government giving midwives and nurse practitioners with advanced skills access to MBS and PBS and we support the circumstances in which this will occur – by working in a collaborative service with other health professionals.”

Further good news for rural patients is the intention to invest in a network of up to 10 specialised cancer treatment centres in regional areas. Cancer diagnoses currently tend to be later in rural and remote areas, with ultimate poorer rates of survival.

Also announced tonight is a new GP relocation incentive scheme – again ‘scaled’ for remoteness – which could go a long way towards attracting locally-trained doctors to practise in more remote areas.

“We understand the need for savings measures in health, including the ‘rebalancing’ of support for Private Health Insurance and changes in the operation of the Medicare safety net.”

“There is to be a very welcome investment in improved maternity services from 1 November 2010, with a particular focus on rural areas,” Dr May said. “It will include expansion of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance program to include maternity service professionals, extra scholarships for GPs and midwives, and Government support for professional indemnity for eligible midwives.”

Around \$150 million in new money over four years for incentives to rural practice is a good result for people in rural, regional and remote areas in a time of straitened circumstances. The Alliance also applauds the refunding of existing targeted rural programs.

“Many of the big questions in the health sector will not be answered until the Government responds to the strategic reviews due in the next two months. The Alliance looks forward to working with government to ensure that rural and remote services are further strengthened as a result of action that needs to be taken in the areas of governance, preventative services and primary care,” said Dr May. “Tonight has provided some good news in the meantime.”

Further Contact

Dr Jenny May - Chair: 0427 885 337

Marshall Wilson - Media: 0419 664 155