



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

Media Release

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Spotlight on COAG to advance rural health reforms

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, today recommitted himself to delivering an affordable health care system for all Australians.

Speaking at the release of the final report from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, the Prime Minister identified his agenda to advance a reform plan through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The National Rural Health Alliance welcomes the continuing focus on rural health in the Commission's report and calls on COAG to retain rural health and Indigenous health as priorities in the reform process.

Chair of the 28-member Alliance, Jenny May, said rural people will welcome the Commission's recommendations regarding funding equivalence, Denticare and patient accommodation and travel schemes (PATS).

"The Alliance strongly supports 'equivalence funding' for under-served areas that adjusts for remoteness, health status and the higher costs of attracting health workers and providing services in rural and remote areas," Dr May said.

Dr May said it was pleasing to hear the Prime Minister acknowledge dental health as one of the starkest markers of inequality in Australia.

"Development of the proposed Denticare will need to overcome challenges relating to rural workforce shortages, training for oral health professionals, and the logistics of rolling out a new funding model. The government will need to move beyond the proposed intern payments to include oral therapists and support for clinical training places in rural Australia," she said.

"The provision of an appropriately funded travel scheme is a key element to maintaining access to health services for the seven million people who live in rural Australia. The Alliance supports the recommendation for national consistency of standards for PATS, including an accommodation subsidy of \$100 per night, a part-subsidy for escorts, and an increase in road travel reimbursement to 25cents per kilometre."

The Prime Minister said the Australian Government would take responsibility for primary care, aged care, mental and basic dental health care, outpatient services, sub-acute services and 40 per cent of the 'efficiency cost' of in-patient hospital care.

“We look forward to more details and to firm decisions about how the Government will respond to the Commission’s recommendations. Rural people will want to know how health services in their town will be improved,” Dr May said.

“Whichever of these recommendations are endorsed, it is important that rural health care is not limited by the number of health professionals available, but actually responds to the health care needs of people regardless of where they live.”

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