



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

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One foot forward: Alliance encourages States to support reform blueprint

The National Rural Health Alliance has encouraged the States and Territories to sign up to the National Health and Hospitals Network blueprint which has the potential to benefit people in rural and remote areas.

“We welcome the Commonwealth move under the new National Health and Hospitals Network strategy to become the majority funder of public hospitals and to take full responsibility for primary care,” said Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May.

“As long as the funding formula takes account of the increased costs and difficulty of providing services in rural and remote areas, the Commonwealth undertaking to fund 60 per cent of hospital activities, infrastructure and training will give hope for the revitalisation of rural hospitals,” Dr May said.

The current National Healthcare Agreement has an undertaking about these formulae, expressed in terms of ‘the Community Service Obligations for small and regional hospital services’.

“The size of the proposed new local hospital networks should allow local leadership to flourish and ensure effective relationships among services in the region and with their communities.”

“A focus on local health care networks also gives us the chance to stitch the fabric of our healthcare together in a way that works for our own particular towns and regions. Close articulation of hospitals, aged care and emergency services with the primary care sector is central to good health in smaller communities,” Dr May said.

Another priority was the need to address workforce shortages, with very serious maldistribution being a serious limiting factor on service development in the bush. “Rural hospitals can make the difference between having doctors in town working with other health professionals, some visiting and some local, or no doctors at all,” Dr May said.

In the next round of health announcements it is hoped that the Commonwealth will focus on rural and remote workforce issues and on building preventive care, primary care, hospitals services and aged care in each region to ensure they work together to meet local needs.

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