



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

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Multi-purpose services and PATS critical for rural health

The right of country women to give birth at a local hospital – and for the elderly to die peacefully in familiar surrounds – was part of a powerful pitch by the National Rural Health Alliance to MPs and Senators at Parliament House this week.

“These are important human drivers, as is the timespan between the beginning and end of life,” said Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May.

“In effect the Alliance has called for a moratorium on the further closure of country hospitals. Instead, we call for reinvestment in these vital services, with increased emphasis on the formation of multi-purpose teams and integrated health services capable of providing acute, primary and aged care service for people in small rural centres.”

The multi-purpose service model has been developed over 15 years and has proved to be effective and valued by local communities. It is time for its principles and practices to be extended to integrated care in a broader range of rural towns and communities.

The Alliance also called for the earliest possible action by Governments to develop a nationally consistent system for patient assisted travel schemes. The schemes should provide a realistic level of financial support for country patients and carers to travel away from their homes for a wider range of essential health services.

Among those who heard the call for improved integrated local services were Health Minister Nicola Roxon and Warren Snowdon, the Minister for Indigenous, Rural and Regional Health.

The Alliance repeated its call for the Commonwealth to assume policy and funding responsibility for all publicly-funded primary care. This would mean one level of government having clear accountability for community health, drug and alcohol services, family and child health, aged care assessments, Home and Community Care and school and public dental programs.

“There are currently nine separate health systems operating in Australia with limited cooperation between them and disjointed information systems,” said Dr May.

“The Alliance supports the establishment of regional Primary Healthcare Organisations to plan and organise the delivery of primary care. These should reflect natural ‘communities of interest’ and have regard to geographical identity, transport and health services connections in rural areas.”