



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

## Media Release

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### **Rural and remote interests keep pressure on health reform**

Representatives of leading rural and remote health interests met today with Warren Snowdon, Minister for Rural and Regional Health, to keep an appropriate focus on how health reform will impact on people in the Bush. In a useful exchange of information, the Minister confirmed the importance of having the structure, functions and governance of Local Hospital Networks (LHNs) and Medicare Locals settled in a way that will work best for rural communities and their health professionals.

The meeting was provided with an update on the work in train led by the Commonwealth and the States/Territories, including the operations of the Commonwealth's new health reform Implementation Office.

Those present emphasised the importance of genuine engagement with rural and regional communities and area health professionals in designing 'on the ground' applications to match the health reform brief.

The Commonwealth was encouraged to champion the emergence of a national health system in which there is an emphasis on health promotion and primary care, rather than on hospitals. In a country blessed with good overall living standards the litmus test for reform will be an increase in equity – including a better deal for people in non-metropolitan areas.

Although the 'preponderant responsibility' for Local Hospital Networks lies with the States, the National Rural Health Alliance expressed the view that a flexible and national approach to LHNs and Medicare Locals will be crucial to success. People at the meeting were pleased to hear that alignment of the boundaries of these two new organisations will be sought and that, where local people and their health professionals support it, there will be a single entity with governance arrangements to ensure the primary focus is on primary care.

The groups which attended today's meeting, including the 29 organisations represented by the NRHA, confirmed their willingness to remain involved in the huge volume of work to be done in the next six months. As well as the details relating to LHNs and Medicare Locals, more needs to be done on performance indicators, monitoring, support for good governance, and details of how the Commonwealth's increased responsibilities for primary and aged care is to be implemented.

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