



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

## Media Release

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### Preventive health agency can work for the bush

Establishment of the National Preventive Health Agency has been identified by Council of the NRHA as one of the priorities for practical action to improve health in rural and remote areas. The Alliance wants to see the Agency progressed with urgency so that it can implement specially targeted preventive programs for 'at-risk' groups, including people in rural and remote communities.

"We believe the Bill should be passed by the Senate as soon as possible," said Alliance Chair, Dr Jenny May. "There is no doubt that, as a nation, we need to focus more on keeping people healthy as distinct from treating illness."

About one third of Australia's burden of disease is preventable, much of it relating to the chronic diseases associated with cigarettes, alcohol and obesity.

National prevention programs targeting these risk factors have been successful in urban areas, but less so in rural and remote areas. For example, rates of smoking in the major cities decreased by more than 15 per cent between 1995 and 2004-05, whereas over the same period the rates in regional and remote areas appear not to have changed.

In the same period, the incidence of a sedentary lifestyle decreased by 5 per cent in the major cities, while in regional and remote areas it *increased* by about 5 per cent.

The establishment of a National Preventive Health Agency was recommended by both the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission and the National Preventative Health Taskforce. Governments should be encouraged to follow up as quickly as practicable on important proposals from health reform reviews.

Most interested parties believe the need and purposes for the new Agency have been well established. The belief that 'form follows function' is not a valid argument for holding up expansion of the nation's work on preventive health.

"A stronger emphasis on health promotion is good policy for the nation and its impact can be even greater in rural and remote areas where people have poorer levels of health, face greater risk factors and have fewer services," Dr May said.

#### Further Contacts

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