



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

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***Rural and Regional Health Australia* to lead the way to better health for country people**

The establishment of *Rural and Regional Health Australia*, announced today by Health Minister Nicola Roxon, is a major step forward for the health and wellbeing of rural and remote Australians.

The new agency in the Department of Health and Ageing will lead work within health and across other departments to ensure a stronger ‘whole of government’ approach to the urgent task of improving health and health services in the bush.

Lesley Barclay, Chairperson of the Alliance, said that people in rural and remote areas will welcome a significant body in Canberra with the explicit task of bringing greater co-ordination to the Government’s efforts to advance rural health.

“This influential agency and a new National Strategic Framework for Rural Health, soon to be agreed by Federal, State and Territory Governments, set the scene for a planned and coherent national approach to improved health in rural and remote areas that is measurable in its impact,” Professor Barclay said.

“A complementary rural health plan will be negotiated with all jurisdictions to drive action within the Framework. The Alliance will provide every assistance it can to *Rural and Regional Health Australia* and looks forward to a close working relationship with the Minister, the new agency and its Board.”

“We also welcome confirmation today that better access to local health information will be provided to people in rural areas through a 1800 number and an information website - another of the benefits from the Gillard Government’s formal agreement with Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott.”

As well as *Rural and Regional Health Australia*, the Gillard Government has a Minister and a Department devoted to regionalism and rural Australia; the Regional Australia Co-ordinating unit in the Prime Minister’s Department; Regional Development Australia Committees; and the new House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia.

The work of *Rural and Regional Health Australia* will be supported through regular high-level engagement with other Departments and entities. Health Workforce Australia, the Department of Regional Australia, the COAG Reform Council, the National Health Performance Authority, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will be among the key collaborators if the Agency is to work well and the needs of people in rural areas are to be met.

The Alliance has re-committed itself to collaborating actively with governments in this work, especially those parts of their activity that will deliver greater equity of access to health services and a better distribution of health professionals.

“We expect the agency to report regularly to the public on key outcomes, like changes in specific health outcomes, measures of access to services, and program funding,” Professor Barclay said.

Some of this reporting will require the analysis of data by remoteness (Major City through to Very Remote areas) and the reporting of Budget expenditure by region.

This high level of analysis and public accountability will pull rural health into line with other areas in which the Government has been working for greater accountability for its health expenditure and its reform effort.

Contacts

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