



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
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## Media Release

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### **Topflight research field to attend rural health symposium**

The country's leading rural and remote health researchers will pool knowledge about the adverse factors currently impacting country health when they attend the inaugural *Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium* in Brisbane later this week.

From July 6 some 70 invited health experts from Australia and overseas will attend the three-day event at the Brisbane Hilton. Among the keynote speakers are Professor Ray Pong, Research Director of the Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research at Laurentian University in Canada, and Professor John Beard from the Centre for Urban Epidemiological Studies at the New York Academy of Medicine.

Professor Pong will examine the distinctive aspects of morbidity and mortality in rural and remote areas while Prof Beard – who spent almost 25 years working in rural NSW – will explain the startling influence of socioeconomic and cultural factors on rural health at a time when regional Australia is doing it tough.

His address will deal with factors currently influencing the decline of so many rural communities, including climate change and the flight of young families to urban centres.

In another timely address, following the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's study on the state of *Australia's Health 2008*, Gordon Gregory from the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) will discuss the impact of rurality on the provision of health care in non-metropolitan areas. He will outline the various rural/remote requirements of health practice and service delivery.

Professor John Wakerman, Chair of the Alliance, will prompt discussion over the research priorities for innovative rural and remote primary health care models, while NRHA policy adviser Andrew Phillips will outline the varying patterns of disease in country areas. His paper will confirm poorer health outcomes in rural and remote areas, and identify coronary heart disease, traffic accidents and suicide as the major causes of higher rates of death outside Australia's major cities.

Professor Desley Hegney, from the Research and Practice Development Centre, School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Queensland, is the Convenor of the Symposium. She will argue the need for further research to identify the characteristics of 'evidence-based practice' that will work in rural and remote environments.

Professor Jane Farmer, chair of the Millennium Institute at the Centre for Rural Health in Inverness, Scotland, will present on ways to evaluate policy outcomes as a means to improve access to care.

In another significant paper Emeritus Professor Max Kamien, from the University of Western Australia, will consider how politics impacts on the provision of health care in rural areas.

“Decision making is often linear, city-centric and usually ignores the preservation of the social fabric or survival of a town. Those at the grassroots often feel disempowered and used by a politicised bureaucracy,” says Prof Kamien.

He argues that solutions lie in the regular collection of local quantitative and qualitative data as a reality check of the outcomes of national and state government policies. This, he says, will require a change from city-centric to rural-centric decision making.

The symposium program, as well as speech abstracts and some keynote addresses, is available online through the NRHA website at [www.ruralhealth.org.au](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au)

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