



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

## Media Release

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### **Budget: Some good answers, many questions and a few disappointments**

Tonight's Federal Budget has provided clarification of some of the key elements of health reform, but a great deal is still unclear or unknown as far as people in rural and remote areas are concerned.

Jenny May, Chairperson of the Alliance, said that the key issue still remains whether people in rural and remote areas can be assured of their fair share of the big ticket items in the health reform agenda such as additional hospital beds, subacute care, and investments in emergency departments and elective surgery.

"It's also vital for rural people to see how the local hospital networks and the new primary care organisations will work together for better health," Dr May said.

The Budget has allocated substantial funds for these new regionalised primary care organisations, to be known as Medicare Locals. "Given the importance of a very close working relationship between these agencies and the Local Hospital Networks, we wait with interest to see whether they have common boundaries and are based on communities of interest," she said.

"We are pleased to have confirmation that rural and remote areas will be prioritised in the additional training and training places for GPs and specialists," Dr May said. "There are also welcome new investments in locum programs and clinical training scholarships for nursing and allied health professionals, and some increases in the number and capacity of Multi-Purpose Services (MPSS).

The introduction of an opt-in 'personally controlled electronic health record' will be of benefit to people such as those in rural and remote Australians who have to travel to access health care services.

However people in rural and remote areas will be disappointed at the lack of action on the dental health workforce, maternity services and on patients' accommodation and travel. "We will continue to argue that the Commonwealth's newly-agreed responsibility for primary care brings with it responsibility for the supply and distribution of dentists and oral therapists, and for a uniform national patients' assisted travel scheme," Dr May said.

#### **Further Contacts**

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