



The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP
Assistant Minister for Health
Member for Lyne

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's First National Rural Health Commissioner:

The Champion of Regional and Rural Health Reform

Australia's first National Rural Health Commissioner will be an independent and high-profile advocate for regional, rural and remote health.

The Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie, will introduce the *Health Insurance Amendment (National Rural Health Commissioner) Bill 2017* into the House of Representatives to establish the role of the Commissioner as part of important reforms to regional and rural health in Australia.

The Commissioner will be established as a statutory officer holder under the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

"The people of regional, rural and remote Australia are the heart and soul of our country, but their health outcomes are often diminished due to their remoteness and reduced access to health services," Minister Gillespie said.

"The Coalition Government is determined that this be addressed – the role of the National Rural Health Commissioner is to be an independent advocate, giving us frank advice on regional and rural health reform and representing the needs and rights of regional, rural and remote Australia."

Regional, rural and remote health is built on the commitment, the expertise and the courage of the rural health workforce, and addressing the distribution of the health workforce in regional, rural and remote areas is a key priority.

Minister Gillespie praised rural medical and health professionals. He said the Coalition Government wanted to ensure there are good opportunities for regional and rural medical students to train and live locally, and for outside students to experience the benefits of living and working beyond the major cities.

The Coalition Government is providing \$4.4 million to establish the new Commissioner, who will work with communities, the health sector, universities, specialist training colleges and across all levels of government to improve rural health policies and champion the cause of rural practice.

"The very first task of the Commissioner will be to develop a National Rural Generalist Pathway, to improve access to training for doctors in regional, rural and remote Australia. Appropriate remuneration for Rural Generalists, recognising their extra skills and longer working hours, will also be under consideration," Minister Gillespie said.

“The community relies on rural health professionals to have courage and the skill-set to meet all kinds of challenges. They form the heart of health care for many communities, and the National Rural Health Commissioner will be their champion, and the champion of rural communities everywhere.”

While the Commissioner’s first priority is the development of the medical generalist pathway, the Commissioner’s role will be much broader and will give consideration to the nursing, dental health, Indigenous health, mental health, midwifery and allied health needs in regional, rural and remote Australia.

For more information contact the Minister's Office on 0435 686 313