

MAY 8, 2018

RURAL HEALTH BUDGET \$\$ WELCOME – BUT NOT ENOUGH

New funding to attract more doctors to country areas has been welcomed by the National Rural Health Alliance, Australia's peak body for rural and remote health.

"We are pleased tonight's Federal Budget allocates \$550 million over 10 years to help fill the health workforce gaps that exist in so many parts of country Australia," said Alliance CEO Mark Diamond.

The government says it will deliver 3,000 new specialist GPs, and 3,000 additional nurses over ten years mainly through providing end to end training in country areas.

"It's not only doctors and nurses that are missing outside major cities. Equally there are not enough allied health professionals. Some areas have no psychologists, no physiotherapists, no occupational therapists," Mr Diamond said.

A new Workforce Incentive Program will provide some funds to general practices to employ more nurses, doctors and, for the first time, allied health workers.

"It's the first step in increasing the very low numbers of allied health workers in rural and remote areas," Mr Diamond said.

There was a very small increase in funding for Indigenous health.

From \$3.6 billion allocated last year, the new figure has crept forward to \$3.9 billion. But half of that increase is CPI indexing.

There is new funding of \$105.7 million dollars to provide culturally appropriate aged care services in remote communities, through the existing Flexible Aged Care program.

There is also \$35 million to fund a new MBS item covering delivery of dialysis by health workers in remote areas.

The National Rural Health Alliance represents 34 national rural health groups including the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Country Women's Association and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).

"We congratulate the Royal Flying Doctor Service for winning \$84 million in extra funding for operational support, including \$20.4 million for new mental health services," said Mr Diamond.

The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia's peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.

“Overall the Budget allocated an extra \$338.1 million in mental health funding. Suicide prevention is a key focus. Particular mention was made of men over 85 years old having the highest risk of suicide, with \$82.5 million earmarked for psychological services in residential aged care. Previously residents have not had access to government supported psych services,” Mr Diamond said.

Other moves welcomed by the National Rural Health Alliance are:

- A Murray Darling Medical School Network will be established. However there will be no extra Commonwealth Supported Places
- 100 vocational training places for rural generalists from 2021
- A new department at La Trobe University for nursing and allied health training
- A new medical training program at Curtin University
- \$40 million to support aged care providers in rural and remote areas for urgent building and maintenance works

“While announcing some solid initiatives, tonight’s Budget funding for rural health is not enough,” said Mr Diamond.

“There is so much work to do to deal with the huge disparity in health outcomes between urban and rural Australia.”

Country people don’t live as long, and have higher rates of disease and injury.**

“Past programs have failed to solve these long running issues, so it’s important to see if these new Budget measures make a difference.”

“Just a couple of months ago the Minister said I share the goals and aspirations of the Alliance. I look forward to a close working relationship to address the significant issues in the sector – access, workforce, indigenous health, and health disparities.

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**The latest Australian Institute of Health And Welfare figures show (Australia’s Health 2016) 29% of Australians lived in rural and remote areas.

Generally, health outcomes decrease the further from a city you live.

Some of the worst health outcomes are experienced by those living in remote and very remote areas. For example, people living in remote and very remote areas are:

- 140% more likely to die than those in major cities
- 400% more likely to die in a land transport accident
- up to 400% as likely to die due to diabetes
- up to 220% more likely to commit suicide.

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