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AMA WELCOMES ELECTION FOCUS ON RURAL HEALTH

The AMA has said election promises to inject \$146m in new funding into rural health, announced this week by both major political parties, marks a welcome shift in the election campaign, with the health needs of rural Australians having received little attention so far.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said the Coalition had released a suite of practical policies to bolster the rural health workforce, which the Labor Party has said it will match.

Dr Khorshid said the \$146m spend offered by both parties, will build on earlier Budget commitments, and further supported strategies to get more doctors into locations where they were most needed.

“We welcome the focus on bolstering the rural health workforce, with shortages remaining the number one issue facing many rural communities around the country. Extra funding for workforce incentives and additional training places are badly needed to ensure rural patients have access to services,” Dr Khorshid said.

“There is unacceptable inequity in health areas outside metropolitan Australia. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australians living in rural and remote areas ‘have higher rates of hospitalisations, deaths, injury and also have poorer access to, and use of, primary health care services, than people living in major cities’.

“For example, the AIHW data shows in 2017-18 people living outside major cities had higher rates of arthritis, asthma and diabetes. People living in rural and remote areas are also more likely to die at a younger age than their counterparts in major cities.”

Dr Khorshid said one of the major issues was access to both primary and specialist care.

“Many people travel long distances to see both GPs and specialists. The AIHW says for nearly all types of health professions there is a marked decline in the rate of clinical full-time equivalent (FTE) practitioners per 100,000 population once outside major cities,” he said.

The AMA recently conducted a [survey of 473 rural doctors](#), asking them for feedback on the key initiatives that are needed to address the problems rural communities have in accessing medical services.

“The details announced by the Coalition and matched by the ALP reflects some of the feedback from this survey, but both parties should be on notice that more work is needed, particularly with respect to rural hospital funding, the National Rural Generalist Pathway, equitable terms and conditions for GP registrars and bolstering non-GP specialist training,” Dr Khorshid said.

Dr Khorshid said the AMA has been calling for a strong investment in the rural medical workforce and he said many of the initiatives announced were in areas strongly advocated for by the AMA.

He said both major parties were yet to commit to major and necessary reforms to modernise Medicare for general practice and deliver better hospital services, if they were to form the next government of Australia.

“Hospitals and GPs across the country are under pressure with funding arrangements inadequate and out of date. The AMA’s [Modernise Medicare](#) and [Clear the Logjam](#) plans provides a comprehensive and integrated approach that will make access to care much more accessible for people in country Australia.”

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