

Friday, 17 February 2023

AMA welcomes landmark funding agreement for Lismore health service providers

The Australian Medical Association says struggling health professionals affected by last year's floods in the Northern Rivers region of NSW will receive long-awaited grant funding from the Commonwealth and the NSW Government.

Nearly one year since the flood disaster, Federal Minister for Health Mark Butler, the Federal Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health Emma McBride and NSW Health Minister, Brad Hazzard have announced \$5 million will be provided to Lismore health service providers, including general practices, medical practices, pharmacists, and allied health providers.

The co-contributed funding arrangement is the first of its kind for health service providers affected by natural disaster and a recognition of the important role GPs, pharmacists, and other allied health providers play in the recovery of rural communities. Eligible health service providers will be required to apply for the funding relief.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the funding announcement was integral to ensuring the financial sustainability of healthcare businesses in the area and ongoing healthcare access for residents.

"The AMA has been calling for private health services in rural and regional areas to be declared essential services so they can be offered immediate financial support and resources following climate change-fuelled disasters," Professor Robson said.

"People need to know following a disaster they will be able to see their doctor for vaccinations, receive ongoing care for chronic conditions, and get prescriptions for life-saving medicine," Professor Robson said.

AMA (NSW) President, Dr Michael Bonning said the funding was desperately needed.

"Private healthcare services in the Lismore region lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment and infrastructure damage. Access to grant funding has been very limited which has affected their ability to return to full operation.

"Doctors, pharmacists, and allied health workers are an essential part of the emergency response in rural areas but are left to clean up their own businesses at enormous cost, with hardly any financial support, all the while continuing to look after their communities and their own families.

"This funding follows a prolonged campaign by health service stakeholders, as well as long-suffering health business owners. The AMA also calls on government to declare all rural health service providers essential workers, so in future disasters they will not have to bear the stress of funding uncertainty in the aftermath.

"As natural disasters become more frequent and intense because of climate change, governments must have better plans in place to support health professionals," Dr Bonning said.

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