



JOINT STATEMENT

PEAK DOCTOR GROUPS CALL FOR ELECTION COMMITMENTS TO FIX RURAL HEALTH

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR RURAL PRACTICE: THE AMA/RDAA RURAL RESCUE PACKAGE

The AMA and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) are calling on the major political parties ahead of the 2016 Federal election to commit to practical and affordable reforms to improve health services for people in rural and remote Australia.

The AMA and the RDAA are today releasing their updated joint Rural Rescue Package – *Building a Sustainable Future for Rural Practice* – which sets out an achievable plan to build a strong rural medical workforce to underpin and build expanded health resources and services in rural Australia.

The Package details strategies to increase the number of doctors to work in rural Australia and stay for the long term, and programs to ensure ongoing skills development for the rural medical workforce.

The AMA and the RDAA firmly believe that building, expanding, and upskilling the rural medical and health workforce is an important first step in ensuring improved health services, resources, and infrastructure for the long term.

RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said today that the Rural Rescue Package initiatives, which propose two tiers of support to revitalise and sustain rural medical services, offer the best path for delivering much-needed doctors to the bush now and into the future.

“Rural medicine is a challenging and rewarding career that is different from metropolitan practice in terms of isolation, costs, scope, and complexity,” Dr McPhee said.

“Rural doctors see patients in their general practices by day, often provide on-call and after-hours emergency services during the night, and many perform procedures at the local hospital on a regular basis.

“They are highly-skilled and provide a critical service to rural and remote communities.

“But, over the past two decades, many rural and remote communities have found it increasingly difficult to attract and retain doctors with the right mix of skills to meet their health and medical needs, including GPs with advanced skills training who can provide acute services in the hospital setting.

“The Rural Rescue Package would make a huge difference in attracting to country communities the right doctors with the right skills to the right places, now and into the future.”

AMA Vice President, Dr Stephen Parnis, said rural Australians deserve a level of access to high quality medical services that is comparable to people who live in cities and major regional centres.

“The key is to attract and retain doctors to work in country towns and communities across the nation so they can become integral members of their local communities,” Dr Parnis said.

"Successive Federal Governments have introduced a range of initiatives to attract and retain doctors in rural and remote areas, but without enduring success in many areas.

“Some gains have been made, but the maldistribution of doctors - both in terms of geography and skills – persists, and the sustainability of some rural health services remains under threat.

“The major political parties must learn from these experiences, consult with the medical profession, including with local doctors, and look to other ideas such as those in the Package.

“A commitment by the major parties to implement the Rural Rescue Package before or during the next term of Federal Parliament would send a strong message to rural communities desperate for better health services.

“The Package offers a sustainable future for rural medical practice, and a sustainable workforce of well-trained rural doctors for our rural and remote communities for many years to come.”

The first tier of the Package is designed to encourage more GPs, other specialists, and registrars to work in rural areas. It takes into account the greater isolation of rural practice, both for doctors and their families.

The second tier is aimed at boosting the number of doctors in rural areas with essential advanced skills training in a range of areas such as obstetrics, surgery, anaesthetics, acute mental health, and emergency medicine. Rural areas need doctors with strong skills in these areas to ensure that communities have access to appropriate acute services locally, including on-call emergency services.

It is envisaged that the Package would be implemented via the Commonwealth's existing Service Incentive Program (SIP) and incentives would be calculated as a loading on rural doctors' Medicare billings, or as a special payment for salaried rural doctors. The loading would increase with the rurality of the doctor/practice.

Building a Sustainable Future for Rural Practice: The AMA/RDAA Rural Rescue Package is available at www.rdaa.com.au (see Quick Links on front page, or Policies section) and <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/building-sustainable-future-rural-practice-rural-rescue-package>

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