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Making it matter: rural people's health at stake

The National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) has named four key areas an incoming Federal Government must address to help rural Australians get healthier and live longer.

The nation's peak body for rural, regional and remote health has also listed in detail what needs to be done in each area.

The four areas are:

- Improving the health of Indigenous Australians
- Boosting the supply and distribution of allied health care workers in rural, regional and remote areas
- Creating a greater research focus on factors affecting rural health; and,
- Developing a new National Rural Health Strategy.

NRHA CEO Mark Diamond says much needs to be done so everyone in Australia enjoys better health. Currently those living beyond major cities carry 1.3 times the cost, mortality and disability associated with illness and disease.

"We are looking for commitments from all sides of politics as we go into this election not only to fund immediate needs but to take a long-term strategic view for the sake of the future of the seven million people living outside major cities.

"We need a new National Rural Health Strategy. The previous strategy was based on a framework endorsed by the COAG Health Council in 2011.

"It's use and effectiveness has not been evaluated since and we need to understand how widely that framework or guide for decision-making in planning and delivering effective and better health care and health promotion services is being used and what, if anything, needs to change.

"In short, we need to prepare a new National Rural Health Strategy for the approaching third decade of the 21st century to ensure all governments and health care service providers are pulling in the same direction when it comes to rural health."

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Mr Diamond says that if people living in rural, regional and remote areas had the same mortality rates as people living in major cities, there would have been almost 20,000 fewer deaths, according to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data for 2009-2011.

“In these areas, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, transport accidents, diabetes, lung cancer and suicide – all preventable conditions - killed 11 more people a day compared with metropolitan areas.

“This situation is unfair and untenable. All that is required is the political will to fix it. In the lead up to this 2019 Federal election we are keen that voters, candidates and political parties understand what it will take for an incoming government to provide good healthcare and health promotion for all regardless of where they live.”

Over the next four weeks the NRHA will roll out more detail on what it is asking of Australia’s next Federal Government. To learn more, check www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19

The NRHA represents all professions and services dedicated to helping rural Australians get health care and health promotion services. Among them are nurses, physiotherapists, doctors, pharmacists, paramedics, surgeons and other allied health professionals. Its 37 members include national organisations representing those professions and other bodies such as the Country Women’s Association of Australia, the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association and the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia.

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