

MEDIA RELEASE



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Rural doctors welcome Senate Inquiry on health services in the bush

There is resounding approval from rural doctors around Australia for the Senate Inquiry, announced today, into the factors affecting health services in the bush – in particular the Rural Relocation Incentive Grant scheme.

Dr Paul Mara, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) thanked Senator Fiona Nash (Nationals Senator for NSW) and Dr Andrew Laming (Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health) for their persistence in calling for this inquiry.

“The scheme that determines the incentive payments received by doctors in rural towns has received widespread criticism from doctors working in small communities,” Dr Mara said.

“Our members have been advising us of the adverse effect it is having on their medical practices, and RDAA has been calling for a review of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) system since it was first mooted several years ago.

“This system has major anomalies, particularly in the Inner Regional zone, that is grouping small towns such as Gunning (pop 500), Scone (pop 5000) and Benalla, (pop 10,000) as equally or even less remote than cities like Hobart (pop 214,000), Townsville (pop 185,000) or Toowoomba (pop 90,000).

“It is hard enough for small rural towns, often with not much more than a main street with a Chinese restaurant, a war memorial and a café, to attract doctors; they should never have been classed as equally or less regional than major coastal cities with their tourist attractions, schools, restaurants and large hospitals.”

Dr Mara also said he was encouraged to see that the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry were broader than just the ASGC-RA. The current scheme simply does not recognise the rural difference.

“It is great to see that the Inquiry will be looking at other factors limiting the supply of health services and medical, nursing and allied health professionals to small regional communities,” Dr Mara said.

“It will also be interesting to see what the outcome is when they look at the effect Medicare Locals are having on health services in rural areas.

“We thank the Coalition for their continued dedication to reviewing the effect these policies are having on the health care available to people in the bush.”

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