

Friday 8 February 2013

Healthy Communities report not so healthy for rural

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed yesterday's release of the National Health Performance Authority's *Healthy Communities* report, saying it is a timely reminder that there is more work to be done to ensure rural and remote Australians have "even adequate" access to local health services.

"The key message from this report is that where Australians live has a noticeable impact on whether they will get care when they need it, within acceptable waiting times and at a price they can afford" RDAA President, Dr Sheilagh Cronin, said.

Amongst other things, the respondents to the survey that lived in rural areas indicated that:

- 20% of people surveyed living in mostly large remote areas, with middle or lower socioeconomic status, **thought they waited longer than acceptable for a GP appointment** compared with 13% of people surveyed living in areas of high urban density and higher socioeconomic status. (It is worth noting that people living in rural and remote areas probably already have lower expectations about access to healthcare in the first place than people living in cities).
- 11% of people surveyed living in mostly large remote areas, with middle or lower socioeconomic status, **delayed or did not see a GP due to cost** compared to 8% of people surveyed living in areas of high urban density and higher socioeconomic status.

The survey responses also indicated that, the more 'rural' you go:

- the harder it is to access health services
- the less GP attendances there are per person
- the less expenditure on GP attendances there are per person
- the less after-hours attendances there are per person
- the less expenditure on GP after-hours attendances there are per person

"It is clear that Australians living in rural and remote regions are still facing much greater difficulties in accessing local affordable services compared to urban communities," Dr Cronin said.

"The new Medicare Local agencies have now been made responsible for the provision quality health services and after-hours care, but we need more data to be collected now, so that we can measure their ability to achieve better health outcomes across their population groups.

"RDAA has put forward strategies to improve rural health outcomes by promoting the recruitment and retention of a rural medical workforce that has the necessary skills and personal and professional support to be able to provide appropriate services to these communities".



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“We call on both the Government and the Opposition to take on board RDAA’s strategies to address this situation over the course of this federal election year, and commit to real measures that make a direct improvement to health outcomes in rural and remote communities.

“We are very keen to work with both sides of Government to develop some great policy reforms and initiatives that would really make a difference at a local level.”

Available for interview: RDAA President, Dr Sheilagh Cronin

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