



Rural Doctors Association of Victoria Media release

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Rural residents at risk from fresh health cutbacks

In the wake of the latest Federal Government hospital funding cutbacks passed on by the State, Victorian rural hospitals have already started to decrease services placing patients lives at risk.

Dr Mike Moynihan, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Victoria, said that these cutbacks will affect every rural hospital in Victoria at a time when they are already struggling to deliver the services needed by their communities.

“Just this week Colac Hospital has announced they will be closing their after-hours emergency service at night from 10pm to 7am, forcing patients to travel around an hour to the nearest open emergency department,” Dr Moynihan said.

"Here we have a town of 10,000 people with another 10,000 in the Shire. Every night, three or four persons, a total of 1500 a year, present at the hospital, many of whom have serious and sometimes life-threatening conditions.

“Delay in the time to treatment compromises safety and increases the risk of mortality and long term disability. These persons are being asked to take themselves to Geelong or to call the single ambulance in the district. Once the first person calls the ambulance, what do the others do?”

Dr Moynihan said these sort of cutbacks were extremely concerning for rural communities, because once services are discontinued, they are very rarely reinstated.

"In rural, once this sort of thing happens it tends to become irreversible. We have recently seen the same thing in Kyneton,” Dr Moynihan said.

“What is the long term commitment of Government to services in these larger towns now that so many smaller ones have lost acute medical services? It is the responsibility of Government under the 1987 Health Services Act to provide a safety net of services giving equity with metropolitan zones.

"This is an essential service and we have doctors available who are trained in emergency medicine and able to provide airway and vascular management at tertiary hospital level of skill.

“They sacrifice a great deal to be in a position to do this and if the hospitals stop using their skills because funding cutbacks don’t allow them to be open to receive patients needing emergency care, these doctors are likely to move to a hospital that does.

"Cuts by the Commonwealth, reprehensible though they are, are not an excuse for loss of a service like this," Dr Moynihan said.

“The Victorian State government needs to take a serious look at what is happening, prioritise bottom line provision of services and fight tooth and nail to preserve that bottom line.”

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