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## Impact of climate change on rural health and mental health: key stream at peak rural doctor conference

**Rural Medicine Australia**  
**19-21 October 2017**  
**Pullman Hotel, Melbourne**  
**#RMA17 / [www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au](http://www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au)**

The significant impact that climate change is already having on rural and remote communities, and particularly the health and mental health of those who live there, will be one of three key program streams at the peak Rural Medicine Australia (RMA17) conference, to be held from 19-21 October 2017 in Melbourne.

Conference organisers, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), have announced that the renowned Australian environmental campaigner and former leader of the Australian Greens, Dr Bob Brown, will feature at RMA17 as a keynote speaker.

Dr Brown, who will speak at the conference on Saturday 21 October, is a passionate advocate for environmental causes and conservation, and is anticipated to deliver an engaging and informative speech on climate change and health.

**ACRRM President, Associate Professor Ruth Stewart, said:** “Climate change is already having an impact on rural communities. The World Health Organisation predicts that areas with weak health infrastructure — like developing countries and remote communities — will be the least able to cope with it.

“For our rural GPs, climate change means dealing with the mental illness that can be associated with farmers who lose crops or livestock due to extreme heat, a change in rain patterns, relentless drought, and wind or dust storms.

“It also means new weather events that we haven’t experienced before, such as the ‘thunderstorm asthma’ that caused severe reactions in asthma sufferers and flooded emergency rooms with patients in Melbourne last November.”

**RDAA Vice President, Dr John Hall, said:** “It is not only critical for our governments and policy-makers to be working now to reduce the impact of climate change on rural Australia and the farming sector in particular, but also to be planning future measures that will help the rural healthcare system cope with the additional patient demand brought about by related conditions.

“Importantly, this will feasibly include an increase in the need for mental healthcare services due to more frequent drought events and the pressures this brings on farming families and rural support industries.

“For this reason, the climate change stream will be a particularly important one at RMA17.”

In keeping with the ‘green theme’ of RMA17, only a small number of conference programs will be printed, with attendees instead encouraged to view the program electronically on the conference app. Printed programs can be pre-ordered for a small fee on registration.

“Cutting down on waste can be done at the individual level. We’re asking our delegates to be conscious of their consumption of products such as the printed paper program, and we’re making it easy for them to do so through our free conference app” Assoc Prof Stewart said.

**The three key streams at RMA17 will be *Climate Change and Health, Sports Medicine, and Research in Policy and Practice.***

**Register now for #RMA17 to discover not only how climate change will affect rural and remote health outcomes in the future, but to also attend workshops and sessions on a wide range of other rural health topics.**

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**More information on RMA17 can be found at [www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au](http://www.ruralmedicineaustralia.com.au).**

**Available for interview:**

RDAA Vice President, Dr John Hall, on 0422 441 481

ACRRM President, Associate Professor Ruth Stewart (via Rachelle Forbes)

RDAA CEO, Peta Rutherford, on 0427 638 374

**Media contacts:**

Patrick Daley (RDAA) on 0408 004 890

Ineke Kuiper (RDAA) on 0408 669 638 (Thursday and Friday)

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