

22 August 2013

Rural health receives the right treatment from The Nationals

Rural doctors are congratulating The Nationals for finally giving the rural health sector the right treatment.

Dr Sheilagh Cronin, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, said that this comprehensive plan for regional health is some of the most welcome news country doctors and their patients have received so far this election.

“It is no secret that areas of rural health policy have needed treatment for some time,” Dr Cronin said.

“The Nationals’ Regional Health Plan gives rural health the kind of high-quality treatment that will enable doctors to continue to do the same in their regional, rural and remote communities.

Dr Cronin said that The National’s plan addresses many of the issues RDAA has raised in its 2013 election platform and includes measures that will help attract and retain rural doctors and assist rural practices

“We welcome the announcement that The Nationals would provide a dedicated Minister for Regional Health, whose primary focus would be on the welfare of regional Australians,” Dr Cronin said.

“Importantly, the success of this portfolio will be measured through an annual reporting process that will introduce a level of accountability into the planning and delivery of health care services in the bush.

“We are also very pleased that their Regional Health Plan contains a commitment to guarantee service levels for key regional hospitals.

“This commitment would halt the hospital downgrades that are resulting in communities losing their services in areas like maternity, mental health, accident and emergency and public dentistry.”

According to Dr Cronin, the most important thing The Nationals’ Regional Health Plan demonstrates is that they understand many of the challenges associated with delivering sustainable health services in regional, rural and remote areas.

“The Plan recognises that additional supports are needed to allow doctors and other health professionals to be able to meet the needs of their communities.

“These supports include incentives to attract health professionals to rural areas and keep them there, financial payments to bolster the viability of rural practices and capital grants that invest in practice infrastructure to create space for additional services and training.

“The provision of high quality health services is critical to rural Australia.

“We thank the Party for taking the time to listen to the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, and for taking on board many of the policy positions that we have called for.

Other issues addressed in the plan include:

- Direct funding to regional hospitals controlled by local boards that bypasses state governments
- Increased rural training positions
- Funding to improve aged care services in rural areas
- Greater accountability for improving rural health with reporting requirements and an annual report
- Measures to address high suicide rates in rural areas.

Available for interview: RDAA CEO Jenny Johnson on 0429 931 120

Alternative media contacts: Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890 (Monday to Wednesday)
Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638 (Thursday and Friday)