

28 March 2025

Election 2025: Will rural patients continue to be abandoned?

With the Federal Election called right on the heels of Budget and Budget Reply, improving access to health care for rural communities is still missing from either party's campaign so far.

Dr RT Lewandowski, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said that as yet there had been no indication that either side is going to address this ongoing concern.

"For rural doctors so far the indicators are pretty poor that either Labor, Liberal or even the Nationals are going to give any attention to actually improving access to a doctor, or other health care providers, for rural and remote Australians," Dr Lewandowski said.

"It is disappointing. Rural access to health care is an issue that everyone knows exists, that we – and just about every other health peak body – have been putting forward potential solutions for, and yet none of these suggestions are featuring in the promises from either main party.



"We are hopeful that there are announcements yet to come that will look to this major issue, or that detail will emerge on promises that are so far lacking in detail that will be targeted in rural. Promised health dollars to be spent on a National Rural Health Strategy would be a great start, and some of the already announced GP training places being allocated to rural generalist training would also be extremely welcome.

"Broad brush initiatives, like the already agreed changes to bulk billing and PBS pricing, will save a few dollars for those people who find it easy to get an appointment to pick up a script at a short consult, limited service, bulk billing practice... which are basically all in cities or large regional centres.

"But if you are a rural patient, waiting weeks to see a GP who has to mixed bill, not bulk bill, or traveling miles to get an appointment, you will see little of this benefit.

"Much has been said over many years about the gap in health spending between patients in cities, and patients in rural. Metro-centric policies that do nothing to improve access for rural patients are only going to widen this gap further."

RDAA has been calling for a range of initiatives to work toward addressing the maldistribution of doctors in Australia, which sees many metro areas having more doctors than they can use, while rural areas run chronically short.

“While both sides of government have committed to training more GPs, no-one has provided the detail on where they will be training. Rural Generalist medicine is increasingly popular among medical students and junior doctors, and rural generalist doctors undertake a training program designed specifically to meet the health needs of rural and remote communities. The detail on the GP training investment is important if its to be considered a good policy for rural and remote Australia.

“One of the key pillars of RDAA’s Election Priorities is a National Rural Health Strategy. Given the complete lack of any indication that either party has a plan to address the problems plaguing rural health services, it seems that this Strategy is sorely needed,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“The Department of Health already has someone on staff who is perfectly placed to do this work; National Rural Health Commissioner Prof Jenny May. What better use of her skills, experience and time than to work with the sector to develop this Strategy?

“Given that the Labor Government recently spent many millions in carrying out reviews of just about every aspect of the primary care sector, it would make perfect sense to task the Commissioner with pulling together these recommendations to build a plan that would actually make a difference to rural and remote communities and rural and remote patients.

“All Australians, regardless of their postcode, need access to quality medical services, nursing and midwifery services and allied health services,” Dr Lewandowski said.

“To achieve this we need to train more rural doctors, we need more specialists to work in rural areas, there needs to be more work spaces for health care workers, and improvements to GP clinics and hospitals so they can work to their full scope, and there needs to be access to childcare to support more rural health workers to participate to their full desired capacity in the workforce.

“A plan is needed to design the incentives, develop the funding models and rural training opportunities, and the supports needed to gain more health professionals working in rural and remote areas.

“RDAA has developed a [five point plan](#) that works to address this, but we need commitments from each party in the upcoming election to progress them.

“We will be watching all the announcements closely over the coming weeks and ranking the parties on their progress toward addressing the health inequities that continue to challenge rural and remote Australians.”

Read RDAA’s Federal Election Priorities [here](#).

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[Photo of Dr RT Lewandowski](#)

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