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**MISSING IN INACTION – MAJOR PARTIES YET TO ANNOUNCE  
 SIGNIFICANT NEW RURAL HEALTH POLICIES**

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that rural Australians are still waiting to hear major announcements from the major parties to address the serious and specific health needs of rural and remote communities.

Dr Bartone said it is surprising and disappointing that rural health remains largely neglected this far into the election campaign.

“It is inconceivable that millions of Australians who experience higher incidence of the drivers of chronic disease could be overlooked,” Dr Bartone said.

“People in rural, regional, and remote Australia face many obstacles when they require access to the full range of quality medical and health services.

“There are shortages of doctors and other health professionals.

“It is harder to access specialist services such as maternity and mental health.

“And country people often have to travel to capital cities and large regional centres for vital services such as major surgery or cancer care.

“We need to see tailored and targeted policies to address these inequities. Rural Australians deserve nothing less.”

Dr Bartone said that there will be some flow-on to rural Australia from the policies already announced by the major parties, including public hospital funding, new PBS drugs, the Government’s Rural Generalist Pathway medical training initiatives, and Labor’s cancer and seniors’ dental plans, but there are still major gaps.

“It is staggering that there was very little mention of rural health during last week’s Health Debate at the National Press Club,” Dr Bartone said.

“The situation is critical.

“Rural communities need real investment in medical infrastructure and incentives to attract more permanent doctors.

“Country towns are seeing medical services closed on them with no other options provided.

“Rural maternity services are deteriorating. Earlier this year, expectant mothers in Queensland were sent DIY birthing kits because their nearest birthing unit was too far to get to.

“Many communities are struggling with few or no doctors, and many doctors will be looking to retire in the coming years with no one there to take over for them.

“In a recent AMA poll, the top priority for our rural doctors was extra funding and resources for hospitals to support improved staffing levels, including core visiting medical officers, to allow workable rosters.

“The pressure on public hospital staff and resources is felt even more acutely in rural, regional, and remote areas.

“Training the next generation of rural doctors is a major priority. We need strategic policies that support students from rural backgrounds to study medicine.

“We want to see investment in programs that create positive training experiences for prevocational doctors in rural areas.

“We need to support these students to complete their training rurally so that they can choose to stay to live and work in rural areas and deliver the care these communities need.

“Rural Australian families need the confidence and comfort of being able to see a doctor or other health professional when they need care or advice, and to be able to get to hospital when they are sick or injured.

“It is not too late for the major parties to provide rural Australians with that security.”

The *AMA's Key Health Issues for the 2019 Federal Election* calls on the major parties to:

- provide funding and resources to support improved staffing levels and workable rosters for rural doctors, including better access to locum relief and investment in hospital facilities, equipment, and practice infrastructure;
- expand the successful Specialist Training Program to 1,400 places by 2021, with higher priority being given to training places in regional and rural areas, generalist training, and specialties that are undersupplied;
- fund a further 425 rural GP infrastructure grants of up to \$500,000 each;
- provide additional funding/grants to individual GPs and practices to support non-vocationally registered doctors to attain fellowship through the More Doctors for Rural Australia Program; and
- support further reforms to medical school selection criteria for Commonwealth-supported students; and introduce changes to the structure of courses so that the targeted intake of medical students from a rural background is lifted from 25 per cent of all new enrolments to one-third of all new enrolments, and the proportion of medical students required to undertake at least one year of clinical training in a rural area is lifted from 25 per cent to one-third.

The AMA's health policy wish list - *Key Health Issues for the 2019 Federal Election* - is available at <https://ama.com.au/article/key-health-issues-2019-federal-election>

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