



2020 VISION FOR HARDWORKING RURAL DOCTORS – MORE RESOURCES AND BETTER HOSPITALS

The AMA today released its 2020 vision for Australia’s hardworking rural doctors – and more funding for rural and remote hospitals is at the top of the list.

“It’s been a tough year for Australia’s rural communities, with droughts, fires, and floods dominating the headlines,” AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said.

“Throughout it all, our rural doctors have been there for their communities, working long hours with limited resources, and finding it hard to take a break.

“In 2020, we want to see significantly more funding for rural hospitals, extra support to recruit and retain rural doctors, and support for the families of doctors working in country Australia.

“Almost one-third of Australians live outside cities. They have higher rates of major diseases like cancer and diabetes, they access Medicare at lower rates than their city cousins, and often have to travel long distances for extended periods to receive appropriate specialised care.

“It’s no surprise, then, that they experience worse health outcomes generally than metropolitan Australians. They deserve better and should expect equity in access.

“Our rural doctors are working in environments and with equipment that are not keeping pace with modern and complex medicine, and the unique health and emergency demands of remote and isolated communities.

“The hospital infrastructure, the equipment, and overall resourcing are, in most areas, not adequate for the needs of local communities.”

Earlier this year, the AMA surveyed its rural members, with three key findings:

- The need for urgent and major extra funding to support improved staffing levels at rural hospitals;
- The need for significant new funding to ensure that rural hospitals have modern facilities and equipment; and
- The need for coordinated medical workforce planning.

“The good news is that our rural doctors love the work they are doing. Rural doctors enjoy treating generations of families, feeling involved in their communities, and tackling a wide range of health conditions,” Dr Bartone said.

“Rural doctors just need more support to keep doing their work.

“The Commonwealth is taking steps to address rural workforce shortages, including the introduction of the National Rural Generalist Pathway, junior doctor training initiatives, and other workforce programs.

“However, much more is needed.

“The AMA will continue to advocate for better resourcing for our rural doctors and the communities they serve.”

Background

The AMA Rural Workforce Initiatives Plan outlines five key areas of priority for Governments and other stakeholders:

- Encourage students from rural areas to enrol in medical school, and provide medical students with opportunities for positive and continuing exposure to regional/rural medical training.
- Provide a dedicated and quality training pathway with the right skill mix to ensure doctors are adequately trained to work in rural areas.
- Provide a rewarding and sustainable work environment with adequate facilities.
- Provide family support that includes spousal opportunities/employment, educational opportunities for children, subsidies for housing/relocation, and/or tax relief.
- Provide financial incentives to ensure competitive remuneration.

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