



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.



Communiqué – CouncilFest 2017

The Council of the National Rural Health Alliance held its annual gathering of member representatives, known as CouncilFest, from 10 – 12 September 2017 in Canberra.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the 36 Member Bodies of the Alliance.

Focus on affordable, acceptable and appropriate access

CouncilFest saw Member Bodies reaffirm strong support for the urgent development of a bipartisan, cross-jurisdictional National Rural Health Strategy. Consensus was also reached on the need for such a strategy to be supported by robust health access standards.

Access emerged as a central theme across the three-day long discussions. During the meeting delegates affirmed the need for people in rural and remote Australia to have affordable, acceptable and appropriate access – not just to health services but to all the factors that underpin their effectiveness, such as reliable high-speed internet, affordable and nutritious food, and health promotion and wellness activities. One of the important highlights was the emphasis placed on evidence based service models that positively impact on health outcomes for people living in rural and remote areas.

Inaugural event of the Parliamentary Friends of Rural and Remote Health

Another highlight of the event was an inaugural breakfast at Parliament House, hosted by the Parliamentary Friends of Rural and Remote Health. The breakfast, held on 12 September 2017 featured presentations from Tanya Lehmann (new Chair of the Alliance), Martin Lavery (Royal Flying Doctor Service), Katherine Burchfield (Royal Far West) and Chris Moorhouse (Chair of Friends of the Alliance).

The breakfast was attended by the following Members of Parliament:

- The Hon Warren Snowdon MP, Member for Lingiari
- Mr Ken O'Dowd MP, Member for Flynn
- The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, Member for Hasluck
- Mr Ross Hart MP, Member for Bass
- Dr Michael Freeland MP, Member for Macarthur
- Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, Senator for Queensland

- Ms Michelle Landry MP, Member for Capricornia
- The Hon Jane Prentice MP, Member for Ryan
- Senator Chris Ketter, Senator for Queensland
- The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP, Member for Lyne
- Senator David Fawcett, Senator for South Australia
- The Hon Damian Drum MP, Member for Murray
- Mrs Nola Marino MP, Member for Forrest
- Mr Llewellyn O'Brien MP, Member for Wide Bay
- Senator Anne Urquhart, Senator for Tasmania
- Mr Brian Mitchell MP, Member for Lyons
- Mr Rick Wilson MP, Member for O'Connor
- Senator Bridget McKenzie, Senator for Victoria
- Senator Slade Brockman, Senator for Western Australia
- Senator Murray Watt, Senator for Queensland
- Mr Tony Zappia MP, Member for Makin
- Senator Patrick Dodson, Senator for Western Australia
- Senator Jonathon Duniam, Senator for Tasmania.

One of the key outcomes of the breakfast was the agreement to progress a closer relationship between the Parliamentary Friends of Rural and Remote Health and the Alliance with other activities planned to occur throughout the year. This idea was welcomed by everyone present and will now be part of the annual plan for Alliance activities in the months to come. The Alliance would like to thank the Hon Warren Entsch, the Hon Warren Snowden and Mr Ken O'Dowd MP for their warm welcome and support in organising the event.

Delegation Meetings

Following the breakfast, delegations from the Alliance met with the following Members of Parliament:

- The Hon Catherine King MP
- The Hon Warren Snowden MP
- Mr Tony Zappia MP
- The Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
- Senator Richard Di Natale
- The Hon David Gillespie MP
- The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP
- The Hon Greg Hunt MP.

Delegates were privileged to have the opportunity to meet with representatives of all the major political parties. It is fair to say that there was strong support for the establishment of the Rural Health Commissioner (announcement imminent) and the need for the Alliance's proposal for the development of a new National Rural Health Strategy.

The key themes of accessible, affordable and acceptable access to services for rural and remote health consumers also seemed to resonate as a core requirement for the Strategy to address.

We have been invited to work closely with the Offices of the Minister for Health and the Rural Health Commissioner (when appointed) to progress this initiative over coming months.

Board election

A Board election was held as part of the Alliance's Annual General Meeting on 11 September 2017.

Tanya Lehmann was elected Chair of the Board. Tanya has been on the Council since 2010 and has served on the Board as Deputy Chair for the past two years.

Outgoing Chair Geri Malone, will remain on the Board in the capacity of Secretary. Tanya and Geri will be joined by John Dennehy as Deputy Chair, Joe McGirr as Treasurer, and Julianne Bryce, Stephen Gourley, Jenny May and Chris Moorhouse as Ordinary Members.

The Council acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the outgoing Board and thanked them for their valuable contribution.

Detailed information about the Alliance's Member Bodies, Council and Board can be found at www.ruralhealth.org.au

Summary of the key messages – priorities for the Alliance

The following activities were supported by Council as the key priorities for our work going forward:

1. Continue to advocate for the development of a new National Rural Health Strategy;
2. As part of the Strategy, develop and define a Service Access Standard which identifies the minimum specifications required to ensure effective access to health for people living in all rural areas. The service infrastructure necessary to provide accessible, acceptable and appropriate access to health will be described as part of the Access Standard; and
3. Develop an Implementation Plan to support the Access Standard. This will provide a focus for the activity required to mitigate the adverse impact on health outcomes resulting from country consumers' inability to access affordable, acceptable and appropriate healthcare.

In addition, there were some important decisions agreed to about how we move forward on these priorities and how we want to work as an organisation. Specifically, the Council agreed to establish the following committee and working groups:

Governance Committee: A Governance Committee is to be established as a Committee of the Board to ensure that the Alliance's governance is effectively administered, including the review of the Constitution, development of key policy documents and the review of all current policies and procedures of the organisation.

Reconciliation Action Plan Work Group: The Council recognised the clear need for the Alliance to improve engagement and support of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and the communities that they represent. The Council is committed, and united, in

ensuring active participation and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Member Bodies and other Indigenous organisations. The Reconciliation Action Plan Work Group will develop a Charter for the recognition and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a Reconciliation Action Plan for the organisation.

Access Standard Work Group: The Access Standard Work Group will commence work on identifying the issues and solutions that impact on the provision of accessible, affordable and appropriate access to services for people living in rural and remote Australia. This Work Group will consider initiatives that have proven to be effective in overcoming health access inequity, and their translation into policy. A key focus will be on identifying the models of care that impact positively on health outcomes and that are both scalable and contextually adaptable to meet the needs of rural communities across Australia. The areas of Indigenous health, early childhood development, chronic disease and mental health will be used as a focus for this activity in the first instance.

Importantly and essentially, the work that was done at CouncilFest 2017 has taken the outcomes from the National Rural Health Conference (2017), the National Rural Health Alliance Strategic Plan (2017-19) and World Café roundtable discussions (held with Member Bodies at CouncilFest) to provide a roadmap of what things we need to do in the months ahead.

Please look forward to more updates on progress as the Alliance implements these important initiatives over coming months. We will use this format to communicate to a broader audience as well about the activities and developments that the Alliance is actively pursuing on behalf of its 36 member organisations, all of which have a commitment to improve health outcomes for people living in rural and remote Australia.

Tanya Lehmann
Chair
National Rural Health Alliance

Mark Diamond
Interim Chief Executive Officer
National Rural Health Alliance

22 September 2017