

Media Release

15 September 1997

A Healthy Agriculture and the Health of Rural People

Any moves to increase the 'economic health' of Australia's agricultural sector are welcomed by those concerned with the health of individuals in rural and remote areas. The attention given by the Federal Government to the difficulties of agriculture through the launch of its integrated rural package is therefore of great interest to the National Rural Health Alliance.

The NRHA is Australia's peak non-government body working to improve health outcomes for rural people.

Sue Wade, Chairperson of the NRHA, said today from Eugowra in Central Western NSW that there is now a greater recognition of the need for all sectors to collaborate on work to improve health outcomes.

"The importance of a Primary Health Care approach to work in the health area is now widely accepted. Put at its simplest, what this approach means is that those in the health sector itself recognise that, to succeed, their work needs to be supported by the work of other sectors which affect the well-being of rural communities.

"One of the keys to Primary Health Care is that the health of individuals is shaped by the economic, social and political characteristics of the communities in which they live. It also has a focus on health promotion and illness prevention, not just on acute care and curative work. Thirdly, it involves all sectors whose activity affects health and it demands the co-ordinated efforts of all of those sectors", Ms Wade said.

"Agriculture underpins the economic status of many rural communities and is important in determining Australia's overall economic situation. The NRHA therefore looks forward to seeing a detailed analysis of the integrated rural package, of how it will affect the well-being of agricultural communities and how its effects will flow on to people in other rural places.

"In addition to the fundamental industry policies which Minister John Anderson and his Department look after, the NRHA has a special interest in the Rural Communities Program of his Department. Work in that area, such as on the Rural Counselling Program, with agricultural women's organisations, local credit unions, on the Rural Access Program and the Countrylink information service, provides direct assistance to rural communities and individuals in need.

"We therefore look forward to hearing more of what the integrated package delivers for the modest but important Rural Communities Program", Ms Wade said.

Further contact: Sue Wade, Chairperson: (015) 268 834 (063) 422 899 (Cowra Hospital)
Gordon Gregory, Executive Director: (02) 6285 4660