



...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Alliance welcomes release of *Pillars of Communities* report

The National Rural Health Alliance – Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health – welcomes today’s release of the *Pillars of Communities* report from the Regional Australia Institute.

The report tracks the number of service delivery professionals in small towns across Australia over a 30 year period. It shows that access rates to doctors, nurses and psychologists in small towns has improved a little since 1981, but that access to dentists and social welfare professionals has worsened significantly in the 30 year period between 1981 and 2011.

Mark Diamond, Interim CEO of the Alliance, says that lack of access to medical and allied health professionals is one factor that contributes to poorer health outcomes of people living in rural and remote areas of Australia:

“In Australia we continue to have a mal-distribution of the health workforce. The *Pillars of Communities* report shows that while access to some service delivery professionals in small towns is improving, we still have a long way to go in ensuring that multidisciplinary health services are accessible to rural and remote consumers.”

Mr Diamond adds that while it is certainly desirable to increase the number of medical and allied health professionals in small towns, the presence of such service delivery professionals alone is not a panacea for the rural and remote health deficit:

“For people living in rural and remote areas, the impact of the social determinants of health (such as economic factors, education and employment) and risk factors (such as diet, smoking, lack of exercise) are a major contributor to poorer health outcomes. Difficulties in accessing health services adds a further burden on country people and has a compounding effect on ill health.”

The report validates the Alliance’s call for a new National Rural Health Strategy and service access standards to drive improvements in rural and remote health. The Alliance endorses the report’s suggestions to: support places in most need to solve local access problems; increase access to specialist digitally provided services; and increase the capacity and scope of effective services that the professional presence in small towns can provide.

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*The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health. Its vision is good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.*