AUSTRALIA’S RURAL LIFESTYLE WELL WORTH CELEBRATING

This Australia Day, people who live and work in rural and remote areas, like their metropolitan counterparts, have much to celebrate. Rural lifestyles offer community, career and personal opportunities – as well as some major challenges. The full text of the Alliance statement is at http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/media/australia%20day%202008.pdf and is reproduced below.

PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL A TEST OF THE ‘NEW FEDERALISM’

Rural patients stand to benefit from improved relations between the Federal Government and the States and Territories, according to the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA). The NRHA’s Executive Director, Gordon Gregory, says a key test of this improved relationship will be the spirit in which the new round of Australian Health Care Agreements (AHCAs) is negotiated and signed later this year – and what they finally include. The full text of the Alliance statement is at http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/media/pats%2031%20jan%2008.pdf and is reproduced below.
CRIAH Aboriginal Health Research Conference 2008
Strong Foundations...Strong Future

The second CRIAH Aboriginal Health Research Conference will be held on April 29 and 30 at Dockside at Cockle Bay Wharf, Sydney. Registration and Call for Abstracts is available at The Sax Institute website at http://www.saxinstitute.org.au

Enquiries:
The Sax Institute
PO Box 123
BROADWAY NSW 2007
Ph (02) 9514 5950
aboriginal.health@saxinstitute.org.au

CONTINENCE: CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
pre-recorded satellite TV broadcast (also available to web stream and download audio) Produced by the Rural Health Education Foundation

Tuesday 12th February 2008 8pm AEDT (repeated Friday 15th February 12:30pm AEDT)

This program will assist health professionals to normalise incontinence in the context of children's development, and to treat, manage or refer the problem if it becomes chronic. The program provides strategies for engaging parents and children and assists health professionals to assess and determine any underlying factors or conditions that may be associated with incontinence in children and adolescents.

Chair: Dr Norman Swan, Presenter of the Health Report on ABC Radio National. Dr Patrina Caldwell, Consultant specialist in paediatric continence, Children’s Hospital Westmead, NSW. Ms Janet Chase, Senior Clinical Physiotherapist, Southern Continence Service Melbourne, VIC. Dr Susie Gibb, Paediatrician, Continence Clinic, Royal Children’s Hospital, VIC. Dr Geoff Chapman, General Practitioner, Sandy Bay, TAS. Ms Angela Cheers, Occupational Therapist, Brisbane, QLD.

This program is the second in a three part series produced by the Foundation under the National Continence Management Strategy.

Further program information and resources and detailed broadcast times can be found by clicking http://www.rhef.com.au/programs/718b/718b.html

Contact: Rural Health Education Foundation via email rhef@rhef.com.au or telephone
(02) 6232-5480

FEBRUARY TIMETABLE RURAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOUNDATION

All details including program information, panellists, broadcast times and other viewing options can be found on the Foundation’s website http://www.rhef.com.au or contacting the Foundation office on 02 6232 5480.

Continence: Children and Adolescents – pre recorded Tuesday 12th February 8:00pm AEDT (repeated Friday 15th Feb 12:30pm AEDT)
Improving Bowel Continence – pre recorded Tuesday 19th February 8:00pm AEDT (repeated Friday 22nd Feb 12:30pm AEDT)
An Ounce of Prevention: MBS Item 717, the 45-49 year old health check – pre recorded Tuesday 26th February 8:00pm AEDT (repeated Friday 29th February 12:30pm AEDT)

2008 NATIONAL NUTRITION NETWORKS CONFERENCE

The National Nutrition Networks '08 Conference
11 - 14 March 2008
Alice Springs Convention Centre, Northern Territory

This conference will be of interest to those working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition. Mark these dates in your diary now!


The National Nutrition Networks Conference
PO Box 280
DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600
Phone: 02 6285 4660
Fax: 02 6285 4670
Email: conference@ruralhealth.org.au or register@ruralhealth.org.au

RURAL HEALTH ON THE WEB

State of California Rural Health Policy Council
Information and assistance for rural healthcare providers and residents.
http://oshpd.ca.gov/rhpc/
AUSTRALIAN HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING

Reform of the national health system and developing a new Australian Health Care Agreement were at the top of the agenda when Australian Health Ministers met in Melbourne on Thursday.

All Ministers agreed that the forthcoming Australian Health Care Agreement (AHCA) was a major vehicle for reform.

A framework for the next AHCA was discussed and support was given for broadening the current agreement to focus on other aspects of the health system, not just public hospital funding. This would be facilitated by integrating some of the other funding agreements into a broader AHCA.

By treating the health system as a whole – in which primary care, preventative care, aged care and hospital care interact – more progress can be made in delivering comprehensive, serious reform, and better patient care. This could also reduce the current administration around multiple agreements, cutting back on red tape.

As part of AHCA negotiations, all Ministers agreed on the need for a nationally consistent data set to detail key areas of healthcare performance covering service delivery responsibilities of both the Commonwealth and States and Territories.

The full text of the Ministers’ communiqué is at

The Australian Journal of Rural Health is a multidisciplinary journal, which aims to facilitate the formation of interdisciplinary networks to build and advance rural practice for all health professionals.

Get published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health!
The Journal welcomes short reports and letters to the editor as well as review articles, original research articles and clinical perspectives. For useful tips on submitting your manuscript, read the FREE editorial, How to get published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health. Manuscripts can be submitted online at
http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ajrh Manuscript Central or posted to:
AJRH Editorial Office
Australian Journal of Rural Health
550 Swanston Street
Carlton VIC 3053
February 2008 issue now available. Contents include:
Climate change and the rural health workforce
Effect of climate change on Australian rural and remote regions: What do we know and what do we need to know?
Health and wellbeing of older people in Anglo-Australian and Italian-Australian communities: A rural–urban comparison
Rural temperament and character: A new perspective on retention of rural doctors
*Trichomonas vaginalis* in Vanuatu
How do registered nurses define rurality?
Prevalence and predictors of depressive symptoms among rural older Australians and Americans
New Zealand rural primary health care workforce in 2005: More than just a doctor shortage
Work practices of primary health care workers in urban and rural health facilities in south-west Nigeria
Focus on: eHealth for the consumer-patient
ARNM: Future directions for Australian Rural Nurses and Midwives

Further information at http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=1038-5282

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**RDAAA STATEMENT**

Health ministers' meeting a critical turning point for rural health's future
31 January 2008

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Join friends of the Alliance in 2007. By joining friends you will receive the updated CD 'Rural and Remote Health Papers 1991-2007', a 2007 friends certificate, and regular issues of PARTYline newsletter. Membership of friends would also give you the opportunity to be involved more closely with the Alliance's information dissemination and policy work. You will become part of a group of people who contribute to and support the work of the National Rural Health Alliance.

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**PARTYline Newsletter**

The Alliance's newsletter, PARTYline, is a means of exchanging information between those with an interest in rural health, including friends of the Alliance, health consumers, health professionals, students and policy makers. Contributors report on their personal
rural experiences, on programs with which they have been involved, provide information on new initiatives and resources, and it is a vehicle for opinions on rural health issues and events.

PARTYline has a print circulation around Australia of 13,000 and is also available online below. PARTYline readily accepts contributions from readers - articles (up to 500 words) and photographs can be sent to partyline@ruralhealth.org.au

Partyline No 31 is now available. It contains articles from the Minister for Health and Ageing and Shadow Minister for Health, as well other material related to the election. It includes success stories in health service delivery in rural areas, reports on the Croc Fest and Garma Festival, community health education programs and other resources and news. Included with Partyline is a hardcopy of the Alliance's Key Priorities document as well as our 2008 calendar.

The electronic version of Partyline is also available in the 'Publications' section of our website at http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/publications/?IntContId=57&IntCatId=6

If you don't receive Partyline but would like to, send your contact details to nrha@ruralhealth.org.au and let us know if you'd prefer a hard copy in the mail or email notification of its availability on the webpage.

LIFELINE INFORMATION SERVICE - 1300 13 11 14
Your Rural Mental Health Information Service
Lifeline's Information Service is a rural mental health information service. Information provided includes: referral to services and web sites, printed material and a range of self help resources. The self-help resources focus on practical steps to help promote mental health in a range of areas. For information and copies of resources call or visit http://www.lifeline.org.au/infoservice and further information is available at infoservice@lifeline.org.au and http://www.lifeline.org.au

FARM SAFETY
New kit to improve safety on sugarcane farms
Sugarcane farmers will be encouraged to improve health and safety on their farms through a new kit released by the Joint Research Venture for Farm Health and Safety. As part of that program this kit, which comes in binder form, helps sugarcane farmers try and reduce farm health and safety problems by giving them the information and resources they need to improve safety on the farm. In the long term, this will enhance productivity and health and safety for individual farms and the wider sugarcane industry by reducing fatalities and the injury rate.
New fact books to aid in the fight against farm accidents
Four new fact books have been released to aid in the ongoing battle to reduce farm-
related deaths and injuries in Australian agriculture. The booklets are designed to raise
awareness of farm health and safety issues and to better inform government agencies,
farm groups and individuals when making government and industry policy on farm
safety. Governments and industry groups have been working for many years now to
reduce farm accidents and these booklets are part of a series that will help better inform
decision-making.

ABS POPULATION CENSUS

2001.0 Census of Population and Housing: Basic Community Profiles (2nd release) -
Remoteness Areas data, 2006

2002.0 Census of Population and Housing: Indigenous Profile (2nd release) - Remoteness
Areas data, 2006

2004.0 Census of Population and Housing: Place of enumeration Profile (2nd release) -
Remoteness Areas data, 2006

2061.0 QuickStats (2nd Release) - Remoteness Areas data, 2007

2063.0 MapStats (2nd release) - Urban Centre/Localities data, 2007

2068.0 Census Tables (1st Release) on new geographical boundaries and (2nd Release) -
Remoteness Area geography data, 2007

2069.0.30.001 Census of Population and Housing: Basic Community Profile DataPack
(2nd Release) – Remoteness Areas data, 2006

2069.0.30.002 Census of Population and Housing: Indigenous Profile DataPack (2nd
Release) – Remoteness Areas data, 2006

2069.0.30.004 Census of Population and Housing: Place of Enumeration DataPack (2nd
Release) - Remoteness Areas data, 2006

Bush Crisis Line is a twenty-four hour confidential telephone support and debriefing service for multi-disciplinary remote and rural health practitioners and their families. It is staffed by qualified psychologists with remote and cross-cultural experience, is toll free and available from anywhere in Australia. For more information
http://www.bushcrisisline.org.au

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY IN ADULTS, 2004-05
(ABS 4719.0)

Overweight and obesity have become a world-wide concern, reaching epidemic proportions. Excess body weight contributes to medical risk for conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, some cancers, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. High body mass was responsible for 7.5% of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia in 2003. The proportion of adults who were overweight or obese was lower among people living in major cities of Australia (52%) than the proportion among those living in inner regional Australia (56%) and outer regional Australia and other areas of Australia (60%). Indigenous Australians (aged 18 years or more) were 17% more likely to be overweight or obese than non-Indigenous Australians. Details are at http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4719.0Main+Features12004-05?OpenDocument

RURAL HEALTH ON THE ABC
(From ABC Health Updates, http://abcmail.net.au/t/73489/614869/1366/0/)

FED GOVT URGED TO TAKE OVER PATIENT TRAVEL SCHEME (AM: 24/01/2008)
http://abcmail.net.au/t/76765/614869/1628/0/

PORTABLE PREGNANCY TESTING
Carl Curtain (Katherine, NT)
New technology in the Northern Territory will mean pregnant women in remote communities won't have to fly hundreds of kilometres for check ups. In a first for remote Australia, the Katherine hospital has purchased a portable ultra-sound machine, the size of a laptop.

PAIN A POINTER TO RURAL DEPRESSION
Jane Bardon (National Rural Reporter)
New research suggests up to a third of older rural Australians are depressed. Forty per cent of Australian men and women reported symptoms in the study for the Journal of Rural Health. It compared rural people in the United States where the same number of men, but fewer women, said they were depressed. Researcher Dr Evonne Miller says the Australians reported isolation and pain as the main causes.

REMOTE PATIENT TRAVEL SUPPORT A TEST FOR RUDD COMMITMENT TO RURAL HEALTH REFORM – CANCER COUNCIL

A commitment to fix remote patient travel and accommodation schemes must be factored into the 2008-09 Federal Budget if the Rudd Government is to make real progress on improving rural health outcomes, the Cancer Council Australia said. Funding for the schemes had barely increased in the 20 years since they were devolved to the states and territories, despite major subsequent increases in living costs. The Cancer Council’s statement is at http://www.cancer.org.au/Newsmedia/mediareleases/mediareleases2008/24January2008.htm and its Budget submission at http://www.cancer.org.au/budget08

CURRENT ISSUE OF eMJA, 21 January 2008
(Available at http://www.mja.com.au/)

Ready, SET, go for academic surgery?
Transfusion-dependent thalassaemia: a new era
Rural maternity units: how will they have a future?
Management and clinical outcomes of transfusion-dependent thalassaemia major in an Australian tertiary referral clinic
Screening for *Chlamydia trachomatis* at the time of routine Pap smear in general practice: a cluster randomised controlled trial
A randomised crossover study of low-ankle-pressure graduated-compression tights in reducing flight-induced ankle oedema
The first year of a midwifery-led model of care in Far North Queensland
Why do interns make prescribing errors? A qualitative study
The national inpatient medication chart: critical audit of design and performance at a tertiary hospital
Pregnant women with fetal abnormalities: the forgotten people in the abortion debate
The law and chronic disease prevention: possibilities and politics
For Debate - Chlamydia screening — Australia should strive to achieve what others have not
Position Statement - Guidelines for the use of infant formulas to treat cows milk protein allergy: an Australian consensus panel opinion
Viewpoint - *Wa! Ningeningma arakba akina da!* (Oh! Now I know, that’s it!)
Book Review - Consultation and communication
Mediastinal lymphadenopathy in a patient with previously treated T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia

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From: Gabrielle du Preez-Wilkinson <gedpw@ozemail.com.au>
Subject: Healthy Systems: Hopeful Futures

21st – 24th February 2008
Novotel Twin Waters Resort Noosa, Queensland

Major Themes: Leadership, Medical Management, Clinical Governance
This conference is aimed at clinicians and clinician managers in provincial and rural areas. For more information, contact Gabrielle dPW on 0408 980 825 or gedpw@ozemail.com.au

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DIVERSITY IN HEALTH CONFERENCE

The Diversity in Health 2008: Strengths and Sustainable Solutions Conference (DIH 2008) will be the major event in diversity health in Australia for 2008.

The international conference will be held at the premier conference site at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, from 10-12 March 2008. DIH 2008 will bring national and international leaders in the health industry together to showcase new and innovative approaches to providing quality health care for Australia’s diverse communities. The conference will consider, review and develop strengths and sustainable solutions in the overall approach to health and well-being of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

To register or to find out more about this momentous event, please go to: http://www.dhi.gov.au/conference. Brochures can be downloaded off the website or you can contact the Conference Secretariat on Tel +61 2 9840 3800 Fax +61 2 9840 3319, or email dhi@swahs.health.nsw.gov.au

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THE WORLD CONGRESS OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS
Perth, March 26 to 29, 2008.

You are invited to register for the World Congress of Health Professions, to be hosted by the Metropolitan Allied Health Council Inc and the Allied Health Alliance of WA at the Perth Convention Centre in Perth, March 26th to 29th 2008.
The title of the congress is "The Future Now: Challenges and Opportunities in Health". The congress philosophy is to open possibilities for health professionals from around the globe, inclusive of all cultures and disciplines, through the dissemination of information, the development of networks and forums, and the evolution of cultural and professional exchange.

The Congress has five themes:
- Global Challenges and World Health
- Innovations in Service Delivery
- Workforce and Training Developments
- Demands and Opportunities
- The Impact of New Technology on Health Care

Who should attend: Allied Health, Diagnostic and Scientific Professionals, Medical Practitioners, Nurses, Health Educators & Researchers, Clinical Managers, Health Executives, Community Based Clinicians, Population Health Professionals, Policy Makers, Private Health Industry Providers and Health Promotion Practitioners.

This is a great opportunity for us to share our achievements and learn from others at home and abroad during this exciting period of reform and significant change.

To register for the Congress please visit http://www.worldhealthcongress.org/info-registration.php. Queries about registration should be directed to Events WA on 9248-5788.

10th INTERNATIONAL PAEDIATRIC AND CHILD HEALTH NURSING CONFERENCE

The 10th International Paediatric and Child Health Nursing Conference is to be held at the Holiday Inn Esplanade and Darwin Entertainment Centre, Northern Territory, from Wednesday, 30 April to Friday, 2 May 2008. The conference is being hosted by the Australian Confederation of Paediatric and Child Health Nurses. The conference is expected to attract between 200 and 400 delegates from across Australia and abroad.

Through the implementation of the theme "Crossing barriers", this conference aims to illustrate that barriers can and must be crossed to improve health outcomes for children and young people. The conference aims are: to advance paediatric and child health nursing's contribution to health care and facilitate the dissemination of evidence highlighting effective nursing interventions to arise the profile of the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration to identify future directions for paediatric and child health nursing to provide a forum that stimulates debate and collegiality.

For more information please visit the conference website at http://www.ipchnconference.com.au or by contacting the conference secretariat via email
at info@ipchnconference.com.au or by telephone +61 7 3858 5503.

ETHICAL RESPONSIVENESS – 2008 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

You are invited to attend the third national conference for the Australian College for Child and Family Protection Practitioners in Adelaide.

The conference theme “Ethical Responsiveness” reflects the broad contexts of Australian child and family practice. Workers in the child and family welfare sectors are generally ethical and responsive. This conference celebrates the work done by both statutory and non-government agencies alike in supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families. As debates continue within the child and family welfare system about the effectiveness of strategies to support vulnerable children, the professions are instead struggling to reconcile the need for appropriate supportive relationships with clients against ever increasing compliance bureaucracy. This conference supports the presentation and testing of practice frameworks and is interested in hearing about approaches which make a real difference to people’s lives. Conversely presentations on practice issues are also welcomed to improve the evidence base of the profession.

Early bird Registration closes 7 March, 2008

The Conference secretariat is based at the Mackay Offices of Relate Human Services, PO Box 1401, Mackay 4740, Phone 07-49575400 Fax 07-49575488
Email: accfpp@bigpond.net.au

From: Rogan McMahon-Hogan <rogan.mcmahon-hogan@deafnessforum.org.au>
Subject: National Deafness Summit 08

The Deafness Forum of Australia is pleased to announce that registrations are now open for the 2008 National Deafness Sector Summit which will be hosted in Canberra 24-25 May 2008. These biennial summits are a fantastic opportunity for disability professionals, carers and the Deaf and hearing impaired community to learn about new developments in the sector, a chance to discuss issues, network and catch up with old friends. The previous summit held in Perth in 2006 was very successful, and we look forward to more success in 2008. Further information is available through the Deafness Forum Website, http://www.deafnessforum.org.au or via email info@deafnessforum.org.au

INAUGURAL RURAL AND REMOTE HEALTH SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM
6-8 July 2008, Brisbane

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POPULATION HEALTH CONGRESS 2008
A Global World – Practical action for health and Well-being

The Population Health Congress 2008 will be held on July 6-9 in the Brisbane Convention and exhibition Centre. Regular updates on Congress 2008 will be available at http://www.populationhealthcongress.org.au - log on to register your interest.

REMINDER - Abstract closing date
Friday 29 February 2008
Abstracts can either be submitted on-line or a hardcopy can be downloaded from the website.

The Population Health Congress 2008 is for everyone working in Population Health in Australia and New Zealand - abstracts will be accepted over the full range of public health, health promotion and epidemiological topics.

Conference Coordinators
PO Box 139
Calwell ACT 2905
Ph (02) 6292 9000
congress2008@confco.com.au

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2008 SARRAH CONFERENCE
27-30 August 2008, Yepoon. Details can be found on SARRAH’s website at http://www.sarrah.org.au

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10th NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
The 10th National Rural Health Conference will be held in Cairns in May 2009. Keep an eye on our website at http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/conferences/docs/10thNRHC/10thNRHC.htm for up-to-date information about the Conference. The first announcement will be the Call for Abstracts in early 2008.

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CONTRIBUTION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION AND DISCLAIMER

The NRHA e-forum is published fortnightly. Contributions are sought on any topic
relevant to rural health concerns. Please send contributions to the moderator at grovesc@winshop.com.au (do not "reply" to this email - send contributions to grovesc@winshop.com.au). Contributions received by the Friday of publication will be included in the e-forum.

The NRHA e-forum is edited by a third party moderator, Jim Groves. As such, the Alliance does not control postings and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Alliance. Nor do postings necessarily reflect the view of Jim Groves or any organisation he is associated with. Jim Groves can be contacted at grovesc@winshop.com.au

Please forward a copy to any colleague you think may be interested.

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Media Release
For Australia Day - 26 January 2008
Australia’s rural lifestyle well worth celebrating

This Australia Day, people who live and work in rural and remote areas, like their metropolitan counterparts, have much to celebrate. Rural lifestyles offer community, career and personal opportunities – as well as some major challenges.

As the peak body for rural and remote health, the National Rural Health Alliance must often focus on health risk factors and the relatively poor health of people in rural areas. However, Alliance Chair, Professor John Wakerman believes Australia Day is a time to focus on the positive aspects of rural living and encourage health professionals to give country areas a go.

In some areas major advances have been made in service delivery. Systems are being pioneered which allow effective collaboration between local governments, the not-for-profit sector and other key stakeholders to develop innovative and viable models of practice. Multi-disciplinary team practice thrives in some areas and is a natural fit with rural areas.

Australia Day is a good time to listen to rural and remote practitioners with inspiring stories to tell about practice in Australia’s outback and small towns. They tell of a challenging and enriching environment for practice, with personal and financial rewards, and strong local support.

As well as career rewards, there are lifestyle and personal advantages that make rural locations attractive to health workers willing to give them a go. Some discover that what they like best about the country is what it does not have – heavy traffic, fumes, daily commuting and a hurried pace.

“If more dentists, doctors, nurses, paramedics, physiotherapists and other health workers
were aware of the great lifestyle and practice opportunities that exist in rural Australia, it would go a long way to solving the current shortages,” Professor Wakerman said.

“This is also an appropriate moment for a national re-commitment to achieving equal health within a generation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, helping to make Australia a better place for all its people.”

With an accurate idea of what it entails, plus appropriate incentives and innovative programs, the Alliance believes rural practice can become a viable choice for health professionals of all disciplines.

“This will help to make equal health for rural people a fact rather than a goal,” Professor Wakerman said.

Media Release
31 January 2008
Patient assisted travel a test of the ‘new Federalism’

Rural patients stand to benefit from improved relations between the Federal Government and the States and Territories, according to the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA). The NRHA’s Executive Director, Gordon Gregory, says a key test of this improved relationship will be the spirit in which the new round of Australian Health Care Agreements (AHCAs) is negotiated and signed later this year – and what they finally include.

“Country people are hopeful the new AHCAs can be used to improve and extend the patients’ assisted travel schemes, run by the States and Territories. A system of incentives relating to State/Territory administration of the schemes could be included in the new Agreements,” Mr Gregory said.

Patients’ assisted travel schemes (PATS) make a major contribution to the ability of rural people to access specialist health services. Much diagnostic testing, complex treatment and follow-up care are only available at tertiary hospitals, so schemes to subsidise patients’ travel should be seen as part of the core services for health in more remote areas.

Assisted travel schemes were being considered last year during planning for the new Agreements. Since then the Government has committed $10 million to patient transport services for Tasmania. The Alliance hopes this may lead to similar schemes in other jurisdictions.

Last year a Senate Inquiry was held into the PATS, partly in response to the long-term advocacy of Senator Judith Adams from Western Australia. The inquiry’s report, Highway to health, called for the AHCAs to include commitments to better services,
improved allocation of funding, and clear articulation and regular monitoring of services.

The recommendations also included application of national minimum standards for the schemes by late 2008, simplification of administrative arrangements, and to have transport and accommodation subsidy rates set high enough to encourage people to access treatment early.

Other potential improvements relate to reciprocal arrangements for cross-border travel, support for organ donors, consultation with Indigenous representatives, and accommodation facilities in new hospitals and health centres.

“Not only will enhancement of the schemes improve rural people’s access to services, it will help keep people healthy and out of hospitals,” said Mr Gregory.

In its approaches to Health Ministers, the Alliance has been encouraged by support for a system that has greater national consistency but is still flexible enough to suit local circumstances.