



**April 30, 2019**

## Health matters as much as coal and water: NRHA

Rural health needs greater focus to help undecided voters get clear about their choices ahead of the Federal Election on May 18, the National Rural Health Alliance says.

“Big issues like water and whether new coal mines should be opened can overwhelm the equally significant health service needs of the 7 million people who live outside Australia’s big cities, but in fact these are all ultimately health issues,” NRHA CEO Mark Diamond said.

“This is why the future guardians of our nation who are elected on May 18 need to think very deeply about how best to care for the health needs of the people of rural, regional and remote Australia,” Mr Diamond said.

He was speaking ahead of today’s formal launch in Canberra of the National Rural Health Alliance’s 2019 Federal Election Charter.

Mr Diamond said the Coalition, Labor and the Greens had each made a start on commitments to improving the accessibility of health for residents in rural areas.

“For example, Labor will spend \$2.4billion to give pensioners \$1000 worth of free dental care every two years but we need to ensure there are dentists that our rural pensioners can get to and we know there’s a significant maldistribution of them across the nation.

“Both Labor and the Greens have committed to creating a much needed new Rural Health Strategy.

“And the Coalition has committed \$100m for clinical trials in rural, regional and remote areas. This means that for the first time, a targeted approach to addressing health clinical research needs in rural areas is going to be addressed.”

Mr Diamond congratulated the parties on their commitment to dates but urged them to think strategically and long term.

The NRHA's 2019 Federal Election Charter, seeks commitments to:

- Improving Indigenous health, specifically, funding 3000 more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and practitioners, ending rheumatic heart disease, boosting funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and endorsing the Uluru Statement including the establishment of a Makarrata Commission
- Improving access to healthcare for rural, regional and remote areas by funding 3000 more allied health professionals into those areas, giving grants so more people can tap into online healthcare, extending Medicare rebates for online consults by GPs and allied health professionals in outer regional, remote and very remote areas and developing workforce models to meet the healthcare needs of local communities.
- Expanding research into the health needs of rural Australia by allocating funds from the Medical Research Future Fund to be specifically allocated to rural health research; and
- Creating a new National Rural Health Strategy to develop a joined-up approach to improving health outcomes for rural Australia.

NRHA Chair Tanya Lehmann will launch the Charter at Parliament House at 11am today.

“If we are talking about giving everyone a fair go, then we have to make sure rural Australia gets a fair go at being educated about health care to stay healthy, and is cared for in times of need,” Ms Lehmann said.

The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia's peak body for rural, regional and remote health.

The NRHA Charter is at [www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/election19).

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