

Thursday, 31 July 2008

GOVERNMENT ACTS ON COUNTRY HEALTH CONCERNS

The formal six-week consultation process on the Country Health Care Plan closes today.

Health Minister John Hill said the Government will analyse all the submissions, letters, emails and feedback from country South Australians about the draft plan.

An announcement on the Government's response will be made before the end of August.

"We won't impose a health care plan on country South Australians that they don't want," Mr Hill said.

"That's why we had a consultation process. We have listened to rural South Australians and will act on the concerns they've raised.

"We will take into account all of the criticisms as well as the positive views, and right now, I can provide these guarantees:

- **no country hospital will close;**
- **emergency services will be maintained** at every hospital and strengthened where possible;
- we will provide **more services, like elective surgery, closer to where people live;**
- SA Health, in partnership with the rural Doctors Workforce Agency will develop a strategy to **attract new doctors** and seek replacements for GPs who retire or leave country communities;
- We have increased country health funding by 55 per cent, and the **increase in funding will continue in the future.** This will ensure the continued delivery of acute medical services and primary health care to country South Australians.

"I can assure rural South Australians that we will respond, based on what they've told us.

"For instance, already we know that people support the \$41 million dollar redevelopment of the Berri hospital, and \$15 million redevelopment of the Whyalla Hospital, as well as significant investments in upgrading services in the Port Lincoln and Mount Gambier Hospitals.

"But it's quite clear that we will need to rethink our strategy for small hospitals, given the strong support they have in rural communities.

"In the meantime, Country Health SA will release its 2008/09 budget that will contain secure funding for country hospitals.

"And this Government is now employing a record 3,204 nurses in country hospitals, 468 more than the Liberals did."