

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## **RDAA calls on Prime Minister to intervene in SA country hospital crisis**

**The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) is calling on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to intervene in the proposed downgrading of 43 rural hospitals by the South Australian Government, by urging the State Government to suspend the plan and ensure continued local access to hospital services in those communities.**

**The Association says the SA Government's plan underlines the critical need for a national Rural Health Obligation to ensure, once and for all, a proper standard of access to local rural hospitals, rural doctors and rural health services for all rural Australians.**

The SA Country Health Care Plan was released quietly by the SA Government just a few hours after the state budget was handed down on 5 June. Under the plan, 43 country hospitals in South Australia will lose their ability to provide inpatient services, forcing 400,000 South Australians — should they fall ill or be injured — to have to drive or be transported by road or air ambulance significant distances to a reduced number of hospitals for care that is currently provided in their own towns.

“This extremely retrograde step will see 400,000 country South Australians in 43 rural communities left with a dead carcass of a hospital and little more than a basic first aid and primary healthcare outpost” said RDAA President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, himself a doctor in rural South Australia.

“Currently these 43 hospitals provide essential care to their local communities and anybody travelling through their regions, for everything from serious viral conditions and heart attacks through to life-threatening injuries from vehicle and farming accidents. Under the proposed plan, inpatient services at these hospitals will be closed and limited beds will only be available for things like aged care and 24 hour observations—maternity services, acute care services and general surgical services at these hospitals will be thrown out the window. Where more serious conditions are suspected or diagnosed, patients will be required to be sent by road or air ambulance to a distant hospital or to organise their own way there!

“By reducing the supports available at these 43 hospitals, many of South Australia's rural doctors will question whether they can continue to practise in the affected towns. After all, no doctor or nurse wants to struggle without proper resources to keep a critically injured person alive while they wait hours for a retrieval helicopter that is frantically attending multiple calls or is grounded because of inclement weather—particularly when previously they had the resources available locally to deal with the situation.

“The Rudd Government has stated many times that it is committed to ensuring adequate access to hospital and healthcare services in rural Australia. Given this, we ask Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon to urge the SA Government to suspend this disastrous plan.

“We also urge the Rudd Government to move quickly to implement a national Rural Health Obligation which would keep the states in line when it comes to ensuring a proper standard of access to local rural hospitals, rural doctors and rural health services for all rural Australians.

“The Federal Government has a carrot and a stick when it comes to the continued delivery of rural hospital services—we are asking them to use both in this extremely worrying situation in South Australia.”

**Available for interview:**  
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