

Media release
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Doctors welcome Taskforce recommendations on SA country health services

The Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA) has welcomed recommendations on future rural hospital and health service delivery in South Australia—provided to the SA Health Minister, John Hill, by the SA Country Health Care Plan Taskforce—and says it looks forward to working with Minister Hill to secure a better plan for the state's country health services into the future.

"The Taskforce's recommendations are extremely important and set the scene for the development of a future plan for SA's country hospitals and health services that is based on significantly greater consultation with the community and rural clinicians" RDASA President, Dr Steve Holmes, said.

"We are particularly pleased to see the Taskforce emphasise that:

[the rural health] workforce is the most valuable asset and the ability to provide safe and quality health services to rural and remote communities is dependent on having 'the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time'.

"This underlines the critical need for the SA Government to put much greater focus on the urgent measures needed to get and keep more health professionals in country South Australia, as they are the backbone of country health service delivery.

"We are also pleased to see the Taskforce recommend the need for greater consultation with rural communities, local clinicians and others in the development of plans for future health service delivery in country South Australia.

"The Taskforce has also recommended that a Regional Impact Assessment Statement relating to changes to services also be prepared, and that transport solutions be developed as part of all decision-making relating to health service delivery, focusing on enhancing access.

"Additionally, it has recommended that the further development of primary health care services, while welcome, should not come at the expense of having to reduce acute and intermediate care services in Local Area Hospitals and Health Services.

"We also welcome the Taskforce's statement that:

'The role of hospitals in country communities is significantly greater than just as a service provider. Hospitals are central to perceptions of community wellbeing, its presence supports local initiatives to attract and retain residents and has brought people together to raise funds, volunteer and enhance social capital. Health service planning should support the goals of building rural and regional communities in terms of population and industry growth. Hospitals are important economic drivers to their communities.'

"It is essential that under a revised Country Health Care Plan, all of South Australia's country hospitals and health facilities—our Country General Hospitals, Country Community Hospitals, Local Area Hospitals and Health Services—have the infrastructure they need to enable them to increase capacity to provide a greater level of services closer to home for rural and remote South Australians.

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“Following our strong concerns earlier this year with the original Country Health Care Plan put forward by the SA Government, we are very pleased to see Minister Hill both welcome the Taskforce’s report and reiterate the Government’s commitment that no country hospital in South Australia will be closed and no hospital will lose its emergency services.

“We look forward to working with Minister Hill and his Department over the coming months in developing an improved and more consultative Country Health Care Plan—one that actively seeks to improve local access to hospital and health services in country South Australia.

“To this end, it is critical that the next version of the Plan also includes as a high priority a range of much-needed support measures to get and keep more doctors, nurses and other health professionals in country South Australia.”

Available for interview: RDASA President, Dr Steve Holmes, on 0428 421 000 and RDASA Vice President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, on 0408 813 143.

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