

Media release – Friday 7 November 2008

Health asset funding welcomed... but rural health workforce focus just as critical

The Rural Doctors Association of South Australia (RDASA) welcomes an announcement by the SA Government to provide a total of \$9.035 million towards the development and maintenance of country health service infrastructure under the Annual Asset Sustainment Program for 2008-09.

But increasing the number of health professionals in the State's country health sector is just as essential and must be an urgent priority for the Government, the Association warns.

The range of measures immediately required to entice more health professionals to country South Australia will be a key issue discussed at the joint annual conference of the Rural Doctors Workforce Agency of South Australia and the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia, to be held this weekend near Adelaide.

"Getting more doctors, nurses and other health professionals into our country communities must become a central focus of the SA Government" RDASA President Dr Steve Holmes said.

"Unarguably, 'bricks and mortar' funding to improve country health infrastructure is critical if we are to continue providing high quality healthcare services to those living in country South Australia.

"However, the SA Government must also recognise that the health workforce is a key element of country health service infrastructure, and should be a major priority on its 'asset improvement' list.

"The newest hospital or health centre simply will not work if there is nobody to staff it.

"Getting more doctors, nurses and other health professionals to country SA is not as hard as it sounds—for example, Queensland has recently been very successful in attracting rural doctors to its country communities by introducing an innovative package that supports and rewards them appropriately for both the commitment they make to working in the bush and the much-needed skills they are bringing to their communities.

"Additionally, simple things like providing better locum supports so overworked country doctors can take much-needed time off and providing better IT linkages between country practices and metropolitan hospitals can make all the difference in recruiting and retaining doctors in country South Australia.

"It is absolutely crucial that the revised SA Country Health Care Plan considers the rural health workforce as a key element of 'bricks and mortar' infrastructure and puts forward a comprehensive strategy to attract and retain more doctors, nurses and other health professionals in country South Australia.

"When the original Country Health Care Plan was released, the overwhelming message from rural communities, was the desire for patients to be able to access doctors close to where patients and families live and that rural hospitals and their health teams were the key to providing essential health services in country communities."

Available for interview: Dr Steve Holmes on 0428 421 000 or Dr Graham Morris on 08 8821 3133
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Note to media: the annual conference of the Rural Doctors Workforce Agency of South Australia and the Rural Doctors Association of South Australia will be held on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 November 2008 at the AAMI Stadium, West Lakes, South Australia. See the full conference program at www.ruraldoc.com.au (go to What's On and RDWA Conference).