

RDASA Media Release

31 July 2008

RDASA welcomes the Government's decision to revise its rural health plan.

The Rural Doctors Association of SA has cautiously welcomed the SA Government's acknowledgement that the Country Health Care Plan proposed for rural patients should be "substantially modified".

After weeks of protest by RDASA, rural communities and other professional groups, Health Minister John Hill today announced he will act on the significant objections raised during the six week consultation period – including rethinking its disastrous strategy for small hospitals.

But RDASA President Dr Steve Holmes and Vice President Dr Peter Rischbieth warn the issues for rural patients – already suffering poor health outcomes - are too critical for the Government to simply rework the fundamentally flawed parts of the plan.

"If the Government is going to produce a new plan for the 400 000 rural South Australians and the 66 rural health units it's important it does its homework first, it must consult widely and allow the process to be carried out over a reasonable timeframe," Dr Rischbieth said.

"If the Minister plans to come up with a reworked plan by the end of this month what role will the recently announced rural hospital Taskforce have in this process?"

"The Health Minister is promising not to impose a 'health care plan on country South Australians that they don't want', so he must ensure he's not simply delivering a re-badged version of what we've already dismissed as having substantial defects.

"RDASA acknowledges parts of the plan should stay, including the increased services in larger regional centres. However, the new plan must consider the sustainability and growth of the entire rural health workforce – not just doctors but midwives, nurses and allied health workers across the State. It must also take up the challenge of offering solutions on how we attract and keep the rural health workforce," said Dr Holmes.

RDASA welcomes the Minister's guarantees that no country hospital will close, emergency services will be maintained at every hospital and strengthened where possible, that more services, like elective surgery, will be delivered closer to where people live, a strategy to attract new doctors developed and health funding will be continually increased in the future.

RDASA is committed to keeping the Government to its promises and working with it to develop the best possible health service for rural patients.

It is time the federal and state government implemented a National Rural Health Obligation to ensure a proper standard of access to local rural hospitals, health professionals and health services for all Australia, so the situation now averted in SA never happens again.

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