



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Office of Rural Health established

An Office of Rural Health has been established within the Department of Health and Ageing.

The Rudd Government has created the Office of Rural Health to drive rural health reform in response to the findings of the Audit of Health Workforce in Rural and Regional Australia.

The audit found that the current supply of health professionals is not sufficient to meet current needs and the supply of health professionals in many rural and regional areas is low to very poor. The audit also revealed that the Liberal Government relied on 17-year-old population figures - from 1991 Census figures - in developing incentives for doctors and other rural workforce policies.

The Office of Rural Health will be operational from today and will be located in the Department of Health and Ageing, in the Primary and Ambulatory Care Division.

The Office will draw together rural workforce and rural service delivery programs, and will provide a focus for the reform of federal rural health policy and programs.

As a first priority, over the next 12 months the Office will review the Australian Government's 60 targeted rural health programs, as well as the classification systems that determine eligibility for rural program funding.

Reviews of these programs are necessary to ensure that workforce programs and incentives respond to current population figures and genuine need, and that service delivery programs and rural health professionals can better respond to the needs of rural communities.

It is vitally important that the expertise of health professionals and those involved in educating, promoting and recruiting our rural health workforce are involved in the significant work of the Office of Rural Health.

The Rural Doctors' Association of Australia, the National Rural Health Alliance, the Council of Remote Area Nurses Australia, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, Rural Health Workforce Australia and the Australian Rural Health Education Network will be invited to work closely with the Department to develop a work plan and provide continuing advice as this work is progressed over the coming 12 months. There will be broader stakeholder consultation at appropriate stages throughout the process.

The Rudd Government is determined to ensure that all Australians can get the health care they need, when they need it. The Office of Rural Health is an important step towards that goal.

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For all other inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office (02) 6277 7220