2 February 2015

New maps to better identify rural, regional and remote doctor shortages

Rural, regional and remote communities will find it easier to attract GPs following the Australian Government’s announcement of new maps to better identify doctor shortages.

Launching the new District of Workforce Shortage (DWS) maps today, the Assistant Minister for Health, Senator Fiona Nash, said the new maps would more accurately identify where doctor shortages exist so that recruitment of new doctors can be better targeted.

“Rural doctors have told me the old DWS map system was no longer accurate and was in desperate need of an overhaul,” Minister Nash said.

“We've heard the concerns of rural communities and we're taking action. Our new system more accurately identifies communities where doctor shortages exist and better supports the recruitment of new doctors to areas in need.

"The new map system has been developed in consultation with doctors and regional communities, and is updated with the latest population and Medicare data. Previously, 2004 data had been used.

“The new maps are an important step in delivering on this Government’s commitment to improve health outcomes for rural, regional and remote Australians through better access to medical services.

“Communities where doctor numbers have not kept pace with population growth will now be recognised in the updated DWS system.

“This means, for example, that communities such as Gladstone (QLD), Mandurah (WA), Manilla (NSW), Emerald (VIC), Koo Wee Rup (VIC) and Murray Bridge (SA) will become DWS areas and will now find it easier to attract doctors.”

Minister Nash said that overseas trained and bonded doctors (under the Bonded Medical Places Scheme) already working in a DWS location would not be required to move if that location became non-DWS under the new system.

The Minister said the new DWS system would also provide greater certainty for rural, regional and remote communities.
“DWS determinations will now occur annually, rather than quarterly, giving towns where population levels fluctuate seasonally a greater certainty and stability when planning recruitment,” Minister Nash said.

Information about the updates to the DWS system can be found at: www.doctorconnect.gov.au

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