



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

## Media Release

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### **Coalition's innovative down payment for rural health workforce**

Dr Jenny May, Chairperson of the Alliance, said today's Coalition announcement to boost the rural and remote health workforce is particularly welcome, with its focus on nurse practitioners and dentists.

"These are the sorts of commitments which, when extended, will substantially improve the rural and remote health workforce – especially in communities without a resident medical practitioner," Dr May said.

The Alliance is pleased to see the Coalition expressing confidence in the capacity of nurse practitioners to provide primary care within their scope of practice, and to see provision for bonded rural scholarships for dental students – a new area for Commonwealth involvement.

"The initiatives announced today by the Coalition also include an extra 100 bonded medical scholarships which will increase the supply of doctors to areas in which they are required to practise," Dr May said. "But more also needs to be done by other means to overcome the mal-distribution of medical professionals. "

The Alliance supports greater equivalence of support across all health professions. "We must be innovative, use all of our resources better - including nurse practitioners - and retain the health workers already in the bush," Dr May said

"In terms of new money, this is a very modest start," Dr May said. "The total additional allocation over four years is just \$27.1 million. But we know from past experience that once these programs are set in place they soon prove their worth and can then be built up to a much more meaningful size."

Nurse practitioner numbers are low because of the barriers faced by experienced nurses in making the transition from registered nurse to nurse practitioner. The additional scholarships for RNs in regional and remote areas to upgrade to nurse practitioners therefore make good sense. That initiative also meshes well with the annual bonuses for nurse practitioners to work in regional towns. Currently there are only 370 nurse practitioners in total in the whole of Australia and most of them are in specialist positions in regional centres and capital cities.

"These proposals are welcome steps in building and supporting all members of the health workforce team needed in rural, regional and remote areas," Dr May said.

#### **Further Contacts**

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