



15 November 2018

Government announcement on rural health workforce

Dear Member

The government has just announced its intentions on how it proposes – very generally - to approach the training and development of the rural health workforce.

You know that for some time now government has been considering two proposals that would significantly boost the way we train the rural health workforce. With recruitment, retention and the professional development of the current rural health workforce becoming increasingly challenging, this is a critically important issue for our members. As a result, it has been an issue that we have sought to influence and advance.

We're pleased with the intent behind today's announcement and in particular the commitment behind it. There is clear acknowledgement of the scale of the challenges we are facing in delivering equitable healthcare to rural communities. Where we have concerns and where I am disappointed is around the lack of detail around planning, timelines or resourcing as to how these issues will be addressed.

It appears as though a proposal for a third medical school at Waikato University is not proceeding but it is unclear as to the status of the other proposal as advanced by Auckland / Otago Universities for rural health schools. The government's intention does, however, appear to be more aligned with this more multidisciplinary and localised approach.

The government's announcement is here: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/tackling-rural-health-workforce-issues>.

We have taken the opportunity to welcome the intention and the acknowledgement of the issues here, while pushing for much more detail around resourcing and action. We have also pushed our perspective that training and developing a rural health workforce inside rural communities not only promises much greater retention of health professionals within those communities, but it provides a visible career pathway for rural kids to enter the health workforce. We also believe rural training facilities will provide significant social and economic benefits for rural communities.

So, this announcement shows alignment between our thinking and the government's, but it is clear there is much work to be done, and in a hurry.

More ...

I committed to working with the government and officials to support the rapid development of a clear plan. I am also taking the opportunity to recommend to government and the Health Research Council that a foundational research programme into establishing a clear and consistent definition of 'rural' is now critical to support the design and implementation of this, and many other, initiatives targeting rural New Zealand.

I will keep you up to date on how this issue progresses. Please, as always, let me know how you're feeling about this and provide any suggestions that I might take up on your behalf.

Thanks

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dalton Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

Dalton Kelly
NZRGPN Chief Executive