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Rural GP network welcomes commitment to rural health workforce

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network today welcomed a commitment to addressing a rural health workforce crisis in the National Party's Education Discussion document.

The NZRGPN is the membership network representing rural general practices across New Zealand.

NZRGPN Chair, Dr Fiona Bolden, said she was pleased with the recognition in the discussion document of the need to structurally address the crisis in the rural health workforce – particularly through education.

"The fact is that the health workforce crisis has now become so severe that there cannot be a single silver bullet that can address this problem quickly or adequately. We welcome any commitment to addressing this problem and any recognition as to how bad this problem is for rural Kiwis."

Dr Bolden said approximately 60 per cent of rural GPs were set to retire in the next decade and 40 per cent of GPs surveyed in the RNZCGP Workforce Survey 2018, reported a vacancy at their practice.

She also referenced the recent interim report of the Health and Disability System Review which found that access to rural health services was "simply unacceptable" and that life expectancy was now lower for rural New Zealanders than for their urban counterparts.

"We believe training the next generation of doctors, nurses, midwives and physiotherapists – among others – inside our rural communities is critical to addressing the rural health workforce crisis.

"All initiatives must be truly multidisciplinary as the chronic GP shortage in rural New Zealand is the same across the full rural health workforce.

"We welcome the acknowledgement of the scale of this problem in the National Party's discussion document and welcome their commitment to solutions. We will continue to engage with all parties in parliament on how we can accelerate all possible solutions so that the crisis we are already in does not become materially worse."

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