



1 October 2020

Political panel webinar addresses rural health crisis

On Tuesday evening, spokespeople from the four biggest political parties took part in the Rural Health Political Panel Webinar, convened by the Rural General Practice Network (the Network) and Mobile Health to address the crisis facing rural health and inequitable health outcomes for rural people, especially Māori. The webinar has been recorded and is [available here](#).

The focus of the webinar was to give each Party the opportunity to respond to the Network's [Rural Health Election Manifesto](#) and its three focus areas: workforce development, sustainable funding, and digital/connectivity.

There was a positive consensus from all four parties that rural health is important, and all indicated commitment to a rural health plan.

In terms of the pressures facing health workforce, there was a cross-party understanding of the need for a larger interdisciplinary health workforce.

There was a lack of consensus, however, on how such a programme for training the future rural health workforce would be implemented.

The Network members are adamant that rural community input is critical in developing an effective training scheme and are committed to working with any incoming government to drive a rural community driven solution.

All parties acknowledged that the way rural health services are funded is unsustainable and needs further investment.

The Network are encouraged by the understanding shown that the current funding streams need revision to take into account servicing rural populations that make practice sizes smaller than their urban counterparts, with rural people spread out over large and remote distances.

It is important that appropriate funding mechanisms reflect the realities of delivering healthcare in rural areas and the Network look forward to addressing this with urgency with the incoming government.

In response to the issues with rural connectivity, and increasing opportunities offered by telehealth, all parties agreed to improving internet connections rurally. This included a specific commitment to providing fast broadband to every general practice in New Zealand enabling community rural health hubs to become a reality.

This webinar enabled an important comparison of rural health policies between the parties for our rural communities and the Network were delighted with the panelists engagement.

The Panel discussion showed the important role the Network has in continuing to inform politicians and officials on the details of rural health needs, the key role that rural hospitals

have in meeting these with local solutions, the value of taking diagnostic tools to the rural communities to address inequities and, much more.

The Network will offer to work with the incoming government to develop a rural health plan that is robust and effective in driving improvement in rural health outcomes.

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