

**RURAL AREAS NEED PHARMACISTS, NOT JUST DOCTORS**

Incentive payments of \$120,000 to doctors in cities to encourage them to move into rural areas came into effect today in an attempt to overcome the shortage of doctors in rural and remote areas.

However, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia says such incentives must be extended to other health professionals, including pharmacists, to ensure that people in rural and remote areas have access to the full range of health services.

National President of the PSA, Warwick Plunkett, said the \$120,000 incentive payment to doctors was only one step in the process needed to bring equity and access to health services for people in rural and remote areas.

“The Government must extend the range of its incentive programs and tax concessions to other health professionals like pharmacists who are also critical to the health needs of rural populations,” Mr Plunkett said.

“Doctors cannot be expected to meet the needs of these people by themselves. They need the services of other allied health professionals to complement and support the work they do.

“At present, pharmacists are catered for through the Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance which, while a very positive and effective program, falls short of the incentives being offered to doctors.

“As part of the health-care reform process, the Government has recognised the need for a collaborative and multidisciplinary health system but its rural incentive program seems at odds with this objective. Moreover, the Government is taking an approach which is not consistent with health reform to promote collaboration between health professionals.

“Attracting GPs to rural and remote areas is essential, but they also need pharmacists and other health professionals to deliver effective and sustainable primary health care services to populations in these areas.”

Mr Plunkett urged the Government to urgently review its policies and to offer more opportunities for other health professionals to move out of the cities and meet the demands of non-urban Australians.

“There is clearly a need to have doctors and pharmacists co-located in rural settings, and therefore the need to incentivise both professions where necessary, to ensure patients will receive optimal care and better health outcomes,” Mr Plunkett said.

“Offering a range of incentives to pharmacists and other health professionals will go a long way to easing the acute shortage of health services experienced by people in a number of rural and remote areas of Australia,” Mr Plunkett said.

**ENDS**

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