



**Rural Doctors Association
of Queensland**
“Caring for the Country”

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Quicksand foundations a threat to Qld Health reform

President of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, Dr Ewen McPhee today warned Health Minister Geoff Wilson that he would need good advice, strong leadership skills and solid budgetary foundations to deliver on recent promises of “more health services sooner, closer to home for Queenslanders”

“The Bligh Government has promised reforms that Minister Wilson hopes will deliver more beds, more surgery and faster emergency care to Queenslanders,” Dr McPhee said. “But there’s been little or no mention of how this will work in rural communities, and there was scant mention of country Queensland in the State Budget either.”

“We’ve been promised local decision-making and local accountability,” Dr McPhee said. “but experience tells us that urban areas seem to be gaining better services while the country cousins lag behind.”

“Having the fastest emergency departments in the big cities makes for good statistics but it isn’t going to help a young mum with a difficult birth in the bush, is it?” Dr McPhee asked.

“It’s important that the Minister gets advice from frontline workers that hasn’t been filtered by middle-level bureaucrats,” he said. “The political forum at our recent conference was an excellent opportunity for that and we know that his senior executives and parliamentary colleagues took some important messages away from that meeting.”

“Minister Wilson is also going to have to be very firm with his managers,” Dr McPhee added. “Regardless of the structure of so-called ‘Local’ Health and Hospital Networks (LHHNs) the managers are going to need explicit directions about what ‘closer to home’ and ‘faster emergency care’ means to country families. It won’t be good enough to provide services ‘locally’ in say, Toowoomba, and expect patients from, say, Goondiwindi, to come there for treatment.”

RDAQ is particularly concerned that LHHNs are adequately funded for their rural communities. “We know that there are health service Districts in Queensland with enormous structural debts. These represent services that were very necessary but were not budgeted for. Our members worry that these debts will be like quicksand under the foundations of LHHNs just as they are put into place,” Dr McPhee said.

“We’re eternal optimists in country Queensland,” Dr McPhee says. “We do believe there are solutions out there and RDAQ will be having plenty to say to Minister Wilson about what he can do, but he’s going to have to work hard at the task ahead.”

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