

1 April 2023

Canberra meetings show genuine support for rural health

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has been pleased with the support shown by senior Federal Ministers, Shadow Ministers and policy makers on the need for reforms to build the rural health system and rural medical workforce.

Centred around RDAA's annual Politicians Forum, held yesterday in Canberra, **RDAA President Dr Megan Belot and CEO Ms Peta Rutherford** met with Ministers, Shadow Ministers and other politicians to discuss key priorities and concerns for the sector.

These included meetings with the Federal Health Minister, Mark Butler MP; Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, Emma McBride MP; and Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, Ged Kearney MP – each of whom were very generous with their time.

Dr Belot and Ms Rutherford also met with the Secretary of the Federal Health Department, Professor Brendan Murphy, as well as with senior Department representatives at a roundtable meeting of rural doctors from across Australia convened by RDAA yesterday morning.

“We were really pleased to see genuine acknowledgement of the unique challenges faced by the rural medical sector, as well as genuine recognition of issues that are concerning us” **Dr Belot said.**

“It was particularly pleasing to be able to have open and honest discussions with Ministers Butler, McBride and Kearney.

“There are areas of federal policy that still need significant improvement in order to better support the provision of health services to rural and remote communities – and of course there may be policy areas on which we do not always agree – but there is an appetite on the part of the Government to implement sensible and lasting reforms, and we welcome this.

“The Strengthening Medicare reforms were a focus of our discussion with the Ministers, as was the need to strengthen measures to boost the number of doctors training as GPs – particularly for rural practice.

“We emphasised that the rural medical sector is open to ‘big reform’ to support the viability of rural general practice – and Minister Butler was appreciative of the fact that our sector is open to innovation, and that we actively support a multidisciplinary approach to providing quality care to meet the needs of our rural and remote communities.

“We also emphasised that solutions for the rural health sector could lead the way to reforms that work across the wider health system.



“At the end of the day, any reform must support the viability of general practice – especially rural general practice – and funding models should genuinely support the provision of multidisciplinary care in rural settings.

“We also discussed with the Ministers ways to increase junior doctor rotations into rural communities under the John Flynn Placement Program, and we emphasised the need to support an urgent expansion of the Program by bringing forward increases in rotations planned for 2025 and 2026, where there is capacity available for quality rotations.

“Minister Kearney’s work on women’s health dovetails with our current work on keeping rural maternity services open, and while RDAA is not a member of the National Women’s Health Advisory Council, her office has provided opportunities for RDAA to engage in the work of this body.

“In our meetings, there was clear recognition from the Ministers that RDAA is not just at the table to complain about things – while we will continue to raise our concerns, we genuinely want to be part of the solution and this is appreciated.

“Peak bodies like ours need to work with the Government and Department if we are to turn things around for rural health and general practice.

“We need to be open-minded to reform, and not just support more of the same.”

Dr Belot and Ms Rutherford also held meetings with the Federal Shadow Minister for Health and Aged Care, Senator Anne Ruston; the Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Health, Dr Anne Webster MP; the Leader of Nationals, David Littleproud MP; long-time rural health supporter (and a former Federal Minister for Regional Health), Mark Coulton MP; and the independent member for Indi, Helen Haines MP.

RDAA greatly appreciated the intent of each politician to make rural health a policy priority.

Photos of Dr Megan Belot are [available here](#) (high resolution) and [here](#) lower resolution).

Available for interview RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot
RDAA CEO, Peta Rutherford

Media contacts Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638
Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890