

Media Release

26 June 2017

Medical Deans Welcomes Australia's First National Rural Health Commissioner

Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand have welcomed the Australian Government's appointment of Australia's first National Rural Health Commissioner, who has been described as "a champion for rural health."

Australians living in rural and remote areas have poorer health outcomes, including higher levels of disease and shorter lifespans, than people living in major cities.

The National Rural Health Commissioner will be an advocate for the improvement of rural health policy and practices across universities, health services and all levels of government. The Commissioner will also work to increase access to training for doctors throughout rural, regional and remote communities.

Medical students with rural backgrounds are more likely to become doctors in rural locations. More than 28% of commencing domestic medical students currently come from a rural background. However, only 21% of doctors are currently practicing in regional, remote and rural areas, where an estimated 33% of the Australian population live. This illustrates the maldistribution of the medical workforce across these locations.

Carmel Tebbutt, CEO of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, said the National Rural Health Commissioner role will provide the opportunity for a greater emphasis on addressing the medical workforce maldistribution.

"Each year, medical schools are taking in larger proportions of students from rural backgrounds, and over the past decade the number of medical graduates has nearly doubled. The real challenge now is to provide appropriate vocational training to ensure these graduates translate into doctors in the specialities and locations where they are needed the most."

Ms Tebbutt said Medical Deans will continue to advocate for effective policy to ensure better health outcomes for rural Australians.

"There are no shortage of issues for the National Rural Health Commissioner to address and Medical Deans looks forward to working with the Commissioner, once appointed, to advance a national agenda for rural health."

Further Information: Carmel Tebbutt, CEO Medical Deans, 02 8084 6557, 0437 476 267