

Media Release

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**RURAL MEDICAL SCHOOL ANNOUCEMENT A POLITICAL FIX THAT MISSES THE MARK**

Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand says that the government is missing the point with its proposal to redistribute 2% of government-funded medical school places every three years.

“We have long supported and worked towards training more doctors from, in and for rural areas, but it’s the training that happens after medical schools that’s the big issue now” said President of Medical Deans, Professor Richard Murray.

“More medical graduates than ever want to pursue a career in rural practice, but at the moment the vast majority are forced to move to the city for up to 8 years to do their specialty training. This is when we lose them” he said. “Rural medical education must join up with regional training to become a GP, a rural generalist, a general surgeon, a general physician, a paediatrician, a psychiatrist and the other specialist doctors with generalist skills that our rural and regional communities need. This is where the effort and investment really needs to be targeted.”

“This policy might provide a political solution, but it’s risking the gains we’ve made by taking resources and focus away from where change is needed. And that’s on ensuring that medical graduates can continue living and working in rural and regional areas whilst they complete their medical training.”

The government has announced that medical schools will need to put in competitive bids to keep their places, irrespective of whether they already have a successful regionally-based training program. It has also committed \$58 million in capital funding to a select group of universities.

According to Professor Murray, this policy has been developed with no discussion with Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand. “There is a real potential for this policy to lead to some very perverse outcomes, and the lack of transparency over how these ‘competitive bids’ will be judged is a significant concern” he said.

“There is a risk that future announcements about medical school places might be informed more by political considerations, rather than where doctors are needed,” Professor Murray said. “It is of also concern to our members that medical schools with runs on the board in producing rural doctors have missed out on an opportunity to bid openly for much-needed capital funds.”

Professor Murray reiterated Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand ongoing commitment to increasing the numbers of doctors in the bush and urged government to work with Medical Deans and others to develop a more effective and integrated approach to rural medical training. “The answers are there; but we need leadership, courage and real collaboration to make it happen.”

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*Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand Inc. (Medical Deans) is the peak body representing professional entry-level medical education, training and research in Australia and New Zealand. The organisation’s membership comprises the Deans of Australia’s 21 medical schools and the two New Zealand schools. As well as having an extensive representative and advocacy role in the advancement of health and education, Medical Deans auspice and manage a number of significant projects in relation to the medical workforce, including the Medical Schools Outcomes Database, Indigenous health through the LIME Network, graduate competencies and benchmarking, clinical supervision, students health and well-being, and social accountability.*