

9 May 2023
Federal Budget reaction

Budget sets strong course to a primary care future — and rural health is firmly on the map

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has welcomed much of tonight's Federal Budget, saying it lays a strong foundation for enhanced primary care services, especially by better supporting the viability of rural general practice.

"While RDAA will be closely assessing the Budget over the coming days, there are numerous measures in it that will significantly assist the rural health sector and our patients" **RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot, said.**

"After the Albanese Government's decision last year to expand the Distribution Priority Areas (DPA) measure to include non-rural locations, this Budget was a good opportunity for the Government to set a more positive direction for rural healthcare – and to their credit, they have done so.

"This Budget has gone a long way to fixing the under-investment in rural health and primary care over the past decade.

"The Government's targeted investment in programs that support multidisciplinary care – and that have existing rural loadings – will ensure rural and remote Australians see an equitable outcome in terms of healthcare access going forward."

Welcome measures in tonight's Budget include the following:

Bulk-billing incentive payment

The bulk-billing incentive payment will be tripled for eligible patients.

"This is a very welcome announcement, and will make a huge difference in helping the most vulnerable Australians, including in rural and remote communities" Dr Belot said. "It will also help to better support the viability of general practice, including rural general practice.

"The bulk-billing incentive payment is also tiered to rurality and remoteness, so this investment will be scaled appropriately to ensure eligible patients across rural and remote Australia will have greater access to GP services without having to pay an additional out of pocket expense."

Increased Workforce Incentive Payment (WIP) for general practices

The WIP will be increased for general practices, making it more affordable for practices to employ a wide range of health professionals, boosting multidisciplinary care and increasing the services available locally to patients.

"An increase in the WIP base payment will enable more general practices to employ practice nurses, nurse practitioners, allied health professionals and Aboriginal Health Workers – all essential health professionals who add so much to the care that a practice can offer patients" Dr Belot said.

"Given a rural loading is paid on top of this base payment for rural and remote practices, it will make a big difference in supporting these practices to attract and retain much-needed health professionals, as well as better supporting the viability of the practices.



“Combine this investment with the **MyMedicare initiative**, also announced in this Budget, and the funding model foundations are strong to deliver multidisciplinary care in general practice and ensure enhanced access to quality care is available from the cities right through to our most remote communities.

“While the Government has stated that it will enable nurse practitioners and participating midwives to prescribe PBS medicines and provide services under Medicare without the need for a legislated collaborative arrangement, we are confident that the additional investment being made through the WIP for practices will, in rural and remote communities in particular, see a continuation of the strong approach to multidisciplinary care involving doctors and other health professionals that has been a hallmark of healthcare in the bush for decades.”

RDAA has also welcomed the following measures for general practice / primary care

- A new Medicare rebate for consultations of 60 minutes or longer, enabling the provision of high-quality care to patients with chronic and complex healthcare needs.
- Better access to more affordable wound care for eligible patients.
- An expansion of the single employer model to enable GP registrars in regional, rural and remote locations to move between the hospital system and general practice without losing employment benefits.
- Medicare patient rebates for care provided by nurse practitioners to be increased by 30% – a positive outcome for the provision of services by these health professionals, given their salaries are often heavily subsidised by rural general practices.

Residential aged care

The Government will introduce a significant pay increase for those working in residential aged care, including registered nurses.

“We strongly welcome this measure, as it can only help to attract more aged care professionals into the residential aged care sector, including registered nurses” Dr Belot said.

Review of health workforce incentive programs

The Government will review health workforce incentive programs to ensure they appropriately support primary care practices to deliver the care Australians expect.

“RDAA has long pushed for the need to discontinue health programs and measures that are costing the Government a lot of money but not delivering on intended outcomes, and then (with the freed up funding) better support those programs that are clearly working in building the rural health workforce” Dr Belot said. “Consequently, this is a very welcome announcement.

“We again commend the Albanese Government on this positive Budget for rural health.”

**A high resolution photo of Dr Megan Belot is [available here](#).
The above photo in lower res (online use) is [available here](#).**

Various RDAA and state Rural Doctors Association representatives are available for interview.

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