



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

**9<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference**  
**Albury, 7-10 March 2007**

## **Media Release**

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### **Country Australians deserve an equal share in Australia's wealth**

In his opening address at the 9<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference, Tony Abbott, Minister for Health and Ageing, told the 1,000 delegates, "We are no longer focusing on just doctors. The government believes it is important to have a whole range of health professionals in rural areas. For too long governments have not done enough for country people."

"Because markets sometimes fail, governments have an obligation to provide salaried and public sector positions to make sure services are available in areas where the standard fee-for-service system does not work," he said. "Country Australians deserve to share in the benefits of Australia's wealth as much as all other Australians. It is a question of justice," the Minister said. "What it is to be 'Australian' is the ethos of the bush. Because of the importance of the bush, it would be a travesty if country people were left to suffer poorer health outcomes," he said.

In closing, the Minister expressed his particular pleasure at seeing so many young people involved in rural health at the Conference.

In the same opening session, delegates heard Senator Kate Lundy, Shadow Minister for Local Government, Sport, Recreation and Health Promotion, accuse the current government of "playing the blame game" as a "tactic of choice". Senator Lundy said how important it was to work against chronic and largely preventable diseases, especially among Indigenous Australians. "Promoting health is about more than just preventing illness – it is about improving quality of life, of which illness prevention is just one part," Senator Lundy said. She said a Rudd Government would have a health system designed to keep people well, as well as treating them when they are ill. Preventative health and health promotion make good economic sense. "Healthier populations drive wealthier and stronger communities," she said.

Also at the Opening Session, Tony McMichael, Director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University canvassed the scientific data currently available with regard to the impacts of heat waves and climate change on the environment and health. He called for a greater focus on the rural aspects of the relationship between climate events and human health and wellbeing. The NSW Governor, Marie Bashir, used her own journey from Narrandera to a medical degree to encourage the many students present in their pursuit of a rural health career.

The Conference continues in Albury until Saturday afternoon.

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