



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

9th National Rural Health Conference
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Good health - not just about giving up smoking and taking up exercise

Delegates at the National Rural Health Conference in Albury heard yesterday that smoking and obesity are not the greatest threats to heart health. Over half of the risk of heart disease is due to people experiencing lack of control in their lives, and “not belonging” in a community sense. A sense of not belonging is also a key determinant of non-communicable disease. A third risk factor to good health is feeling hopeless and a lack of a sense of future.

“We are not always sure what we can do about social equity, but these three – control, belonging, and a sense of hope and future – we can work on,” said Rhonda Galbally, CEO of Our Community.

Rhonda commended the valuable social and health contribution made by small community groups, especially when they are inclusive, well run, robust and financially well-supported. “Such groups are the best places in which people can find a sense of control, a sense of belonging and a sense of hope. They are the unsung heroes in the efforts to improve health and wellbeing,” Ms Galbally said.

Dr Steve Clark, Secretary of Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, reflected on the previous eight National Rural Health Conferences over the last seventeen years. There are only two topics that have been discussed at all eight Conferences. One was the need for strategic reform of Aboriginal health policy and the other was the importance of health and medical research. Aged care had been an issue for seven of the eight Conferences. Delegates were assured that Aboriginal health would remain on the agendas for the National Rural Health Conferences until the problem was fixed. The goal for Indigenous people at this year’s conference is equal health within a generation.

Also at the Conference, John Menadue challenged the government to address the restrictive workforce practices that exist in the health industry. “Such practices would not be tolerated in other industries,” he said, “and they mitigate against an effective and efficient system of health delivery.”

He also strongly promoted the protection and enhancement of universal health care, through Medicare, and funded from tax revenues. “Where there are two-tier systems in other countries, it has led to higher costs. The same will happen in Australia and it will have its greatest detrimental effect in rural and remote areas,” he said.

He saw insufficient funding as a cause of some rural hospitals becoming unsafe. “The health of country people would be better served by direct investment in community health centres, with co-payments by those well-off, and low-cost or no-cost care for those who cannot afford to pay,” he said.

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