



Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie

Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Minister for Regional Services
Minister for Sport
Minister for Local Government and Decentralisation
Senator for Victoria

Ref No: MC18-019131

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

18 SEP 2018

Dear Mayor

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 August 2018 regarding the issues discussed at the National General Assembly of Local Government in June 2018.

The request for the Federal Health Minister to formulate a joint taskforce representing local, state and Federal spheres of government, to formulate model financial packages for the engagement of doctors in rural towns, and contribute to those financial packages is acknowledged.

The Coalition Government funds the Rural Workforce Agencies in each state and the Northern Territory around \$86 million (GST inclusive) over three years to June 2020 to deliver the Rural Health Workforce Support Activity (RWA Program). Under the RWA Program, Rural Workforce Agencies deliver a range of activities aimed at improving the access, quality and sustainability of the rural health workforce. This includes providing assistance to communities that experience difficulties attracting and retaining health professionals into regional, rural and remote areas. Rural Workforce Agencies work with local practices, communities and other organisations to ensure that rural Australia is served by a skilled, well-supported health workforce.

A key element of the RWA Program is the establishment of Health Workforce Stakeholder Groups in each jurisdiction which include representation from key rural health workforce stakeholders. This includes Regional Training Organisations, Primary Health Networks, Rural Health Outreach Fund-holders, Specialist Training Pathway Providers, Rural Clinical Schools, Regional Training Hubs, state Health Departments, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Peak Bodies. Health Workforce Stakeholder Groups help ensure that Rural Workforce Agency activities are prioritised according to need, and complement, rather than duplicate, other organisations' efforts.

In the 2018-19 Budget, the Coalition Government announced the Stronger Rural Health Strategy, a carefully calibrated suite of measures to address each stage of medical workforce supply – teaching, training and retention. It is a historic 10-year plan to meet current and future health workforce challenges and it supports the largest overhaul of Australia's health workforce in decades.

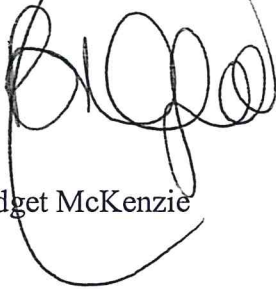
The Strategy will deliver a comprehensive package of reforms in a \$550 million investment over five years from 2017-18. The Strategy will provide all Australians with the right mix of qualified health professionals in the right place, at the right time to deliver high quality health care. It includes a range of incentives, targeted funding and bonding arrangements to meet head-on the challenge of redistributing the workforce across regional, rural and remote Australia, beyond the cities and metropolitan areas.

As part of the 2018-19 Budget, the Government announced an additional \$84.1 million in funding over four years to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which commenced 1 July 2018. This funding will increase the availability of dental services beyond March 2019, deliver new mental health services from 1 January 2019 and continue traditional services to rural and remote Australia.

Of this additional funding, approximately \$20 million will be provided for the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver mental health services in rural and remote Australia. This will allow those in most need to have access to mental health professionals where the technology for telehealth may not be available, or is costly.

I would like to thank you and the Australian Local Government Association for the important work done in local communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget McKenzie', written over a large, faint circular outline.

Bridget McKenzie