

9 September 2024

## One piece doesn't make a jigsaw: RDAA President brings 'Big Picture' message to Canberra

**The time for tinkering around the edges with health policy is over, with a 'big picture' approach needed to deliver a bright future for rural healthcare in Australia.**

That will be the message delivered this week in Canberra by the President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), **Dr RT Lewandowski**, when he meets with Government, Opposition and Federal Health Department representatives.

"We are at a critical turning point in health reform in Australia – particularly in how that reform will impact on the future of rural healthcare in this country"

**Dr Lewandowski said.**

"Our healthcare system is like a puzzle; without all the right pieces in the right places it's just a chaotic mess. Real improvement can't be made by just changing the pieces...those pieces all need to fit together to make a cohesive big picture.

"With recommendations from a range of reviews currently being considered, it is incredibly important we talk with the Government, Opposition and Health Department about what the rural health sector needs to see delivered from these reviews – to not only survive, but thrive, into the future."



**While in Canberra, Dr Lewandowski will meet with:**

- Federal Health Minister, Mark Butler MP
- Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health, Emma McBride MP
- Shadow Health Minister, Senator Anne Ruston
- Leader of the Nationals, David Littleproud MP
- Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Health, Dr Anne Webster MP
- Shadow Minister for Immigration, Dan Tehan MP
- Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Education, Darren Chester MP
- Senior representatives from the Federal Health Department, including Blair Comley PSM (Secretary of the Department) and his Deputy Secretaries.

"The medical principle of 'First, do no harm' also applies to health policy" **Dr Lewandowski said.**

"We must ensure that any proposed health reform is considered in its entirety and not just as individual pieces of the healthcare 'jigsaw'. Doing this can badly impact on other areas of the sector.

"We need big picture progress on health reform because micro-reform costs a ton of money but doesn't deliver real improvements. While whole-of-system reform takes additional investment, particularly in rural healthcare, focusing on the big picture ensures that investment is not wasted."

**A number of federal reviews into health policy reform have been underway:**

- Recommendations from the interim report of the **National Health Reform Agreement** were recently tabled – including recommendations to increase funding to support teaching and research at rural and remote hospitals, and address the inequity of billing that patients face when attending small rural hospital emergency departments (EDs) in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.
- The **GP Incentives Review’s Expert Advisory Panel** recently tabled its Draft Recommendations – [RDAA has provided its response to the recommendations](#).
- The **Scope of Practice Review** is expected to deliver its Final Report in October.
- The **Independent Review of Overseas Health Practitioner Regulatory Settings (the Kruk Review)** provided its Final Report in December 2023, with recommendations on the overseas trained health workforce and a particular focus on their contribution to the health workforce in rural and remote Australia.

“Key policy changes coming out of these reviews, if implemented with the big picture in mind, should complement the exciting developments already underway in the rural health space” **Dr Lewandowski said**.

“These include the growing success of the National Rural Generalist Pathway across Australia and increased interest from medical students and junior doctors in rural medical careers.

“Implementing the package of supports and incentives that has been recommended to Government by its National Rural Generalist Taskforce is really helping to extend the appeal of this Pathway to the next generation of doctors.

“Progress takes time but we are starting to see really positive results when there is a multi-faceted approach to the goal. We now need to keep the momentum going, not fall into the ‘one step forward, two steps back’ routine.

“The current oversubscription of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine’s (ACRRM) Rural Generalist Training Scheme is a good example of this. This scheme combines changes to the way registrars are employed, how they are paid, and how their skills are recognised and incentivised, along with increased flexibility in their training pathway.

“When the pieces of the puzzle are aligned we get big picture outcomes, but it takes courage from governments and policy-makers to commit the additional investment in infrastructure and systems to get these results.

“I look forward to discussing all this in my meetings in Canberra this week.”

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**Dr Lewandowski will be in Canberra from Monday to Wednesday this week, and is available for interviews.**

**A high resolution photo of Dr RT Lewandowski is [available here](#).**

**Available for interview:** RDAA President, Dr RT Lewandowski  
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