



17 June 2020

Rural focus welcomed in health review, but urgent action needed

The NZ Rural General Practice Network today welcomed the Health and Disability System Review's focus on addressing inequity in access to health care for rural communities, but said action was now needed with real urgency.

The new Chief Executive for the NZRGPN, Grant Davidson, said he would take time to digest the report and discuss it with its members, but welcomed the acknowledgement of the pressing need to address rural health.

"The first report noted that access to healthcare for rural communities was 'unacceptable' and the extent to which rural communities and their inequitable access to healthcare is a focus in this report is welcomed," Grant Davidson.

"We also welcome the acknowledgement that rural communities need to be more involved in health care service design and that the training of healthcare professionals should occur inside these communities if we are to build a sustainable rural health workforce.

"However, none of what is acknowledged in this report in relation to rural health is new and our concern is a lack of tangible, immediate and measurable action for rural communities in this report.

"It's been known for too long now that rural health is in a state of crisis and more and more rural communities struggle to see a GP within a reasonable period of time. We know for a fact that rural GPs are now retiring at an alarming rate, as are rural nurses," he said.

"We are just not seeing the rural health workforce being replaced and, as a consequence, rural health professionals continue to come under ever greater pressure. This is not sustainable; the rural health sector is at breaking point."

Grant Davidson said there was a clear need for an urgent, well-resourced plan to build the rural health workforce and he would be discussing the immediate steps that can be taken with the rural health sector over the coming weeks.

"The report is an important contribution to building a health system that works more equitably for all New Zealanders, but it is disappointing light on the detail we so desperately need in order to begin to restore adequate and equitable health care services for rural New Zealand.

"Our focus remains on pushing hard for urgent action to start to remedy the situation in which many rural communities struggle to access basic primary healthcare."

Grant Davidson: 027 474 3471