MEDIA RELEASE

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Stronger Rural Health Strategy delivering high quality care

As the Deputy Leader of The Nationals ensuring that regional and rural Australians can access the 21st century health care is a key priority. The Coalition is committed to responding to the challenge of ensuring Australia has the right mix of health professionals to deliver high quality healthcare to those in need, particularly those in rural and regional areas.

The Coalition Government will deliver a comprehensive and transformational rural health package over the next 10 years. The $550 million Stronger Rural Health Strategy will provide contemporary health care and put 3000 more highly qualified doctors and more than 3000 nurses and hundreds more allied health professionals into the regions over the next 10 years. This will ensure people living in rural, regional and remote Australia have better access to health services.

The Strategy will offer greater opportunities for Australian doctors through targeted teaching, training and retention initiatives. GP training and qualification arrangements will be streamlined to provide more Australian trained doctors where they are needed most.

The evidence is clear; the longer time spent training in the regions the more likely graduates are to practice in the regions. To support a continuum for doctors to learn, train and ultimately practise in rural and regional Australia, the Coalition Government will invest $95.4 million to establish a medical school network in the Murray Darling region.

This is a fundamental change in the training and supply of rural and regional doctors and will transform the medical training pipeline. For the first time, students will be able to undertake most of their education in rural areas.

The Murray Darling Medical Schools Network will include Charles Sturt University/Western Sydney University (Orange), Monash University (Bendigo, Mildura), University of NSW (Wagga Wagga), University of Melbourne/La Trobe University (Wodonga, Shepparton, Bendigo) and University of Sydney (Dubbo).
Expanded and new junior doctor programs will mean that young doctors, after graduation, can stay working in the regions in supported positions and have, for the first time, through the More Doctors for Rural Australia Program, access to Medicare provider numbers when working in supervised general practice locations. These doctors can then enter new streamlined and expanded general practice specialist training programs delivered by the two general practice colleges, including an expansion in the important rural generalist training.

The strategy also provides an opportunity for the many doctors, currently working in Australia, without full specialist GP qualifications, to gain these qualifications, so that all Australians can have access to a fully qualified GP.

A new consolidated Workforce Incentive Program provides a clear financial incentive to encourage more doctors to rural and remote areas. It will also support general practices to employ nurses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals, and allied health professionals, including non-dispensing pharmacists, in multidisciplinary and team-based primary health care.

Nurse practitioners have a breadth of skills which can effectively support GPs to deliver high quality health outcomes, particularly in regional areas. The role of nurses will be strengthened by enhancing their role in frontline service delivery which will improve patient care and keep pace with the increasing demand for services.

For the first time, a comprehensive new planning tool will provide a single source of quality data to ensure the community is able to access health services and ensure workforce resources respond to identified needs. This will better inform workforce analysis and assist with future planning across the health system.

Changes to Medicare billing arrangements will provide incentives for doctors to qualify as vocationally recognised or specialist GPs outside major cities and funding will be provided to support the training for these specialist qualifications. Rural bulk billing incentive payments will be better aligned with areas of need by updating how areas are classified.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service will receive additional funding of $84 million to increase the availability of dental services, provide new mental health services and ensure ambulance services in rural and remote areas.

**Building a more active Australia**

The Coalition Government has delivered a $230 million package of sports and physical activity participation initiatives to encourage more Australians to be more active, more often.

Participation in sport and physical activity is vital for the health and wellbeing of all Australians, and is foundational to the Government’s national sports agenda. National and community sporting organisations, schools and other organisations will share in the significant funding to encourage more Australians to be active.

At the grassroots level, the Government will invest $50.4 million to implement a suite of initiatives to improve access to, and increase participation in physical activity. This will be targeted at the less active across all ages or stages of life. The Government will continue to fund the AusSport survey to measure activity levels in Australia and provide increased funding to expand the incredibly popular and important Local Sporting Champions program. This additional funding will support a further 3,000 athletes – a 56 per cent increase, with an increase in funding for young developing athletes in the regions.
The Sporting Schools Program will be extended by $41.7 million to deliver high quality sporting activities for students and will encourage children to play sport, be active and reduce the costs for parents. Up to 1.1 million primary and secondary school students will take part in the program.

Community based, sporting clubs will share in infrastructure grants of up to $500,000 for small to medium scale projects or improvements to existing, ageing or outmoded facilities. The program aims to ensure more Australians have access to quality sporting facilities, encouraging greater community participation in sport, while ensuring the surge in women’s sport is supported by appropriate infrastructure.

The success of AFLW, the Matildas, the Diamonds Netball team, Australians women’s Cricket and Rugby Sevens teams has led to an upsurge in women’s participation in sport and this will provide an opportunity for community clubs to ensure they are able to meet the increasing demand by ensuring they have appropriate facilities.

The Government is investing to protect the integrity of Australian sport while the Government fully considers the full suite of recommendations from the Independent Review of Australia’s Sports Integrity Arrangements. This interim funding will help protect the reputation of Australian sport, and preserve the role sport plays in delivering social, economic and health benefits to all Australians.

As part of our Ageing package we are also providing $22.9 million to increase physical activity in older Australians through sport and non-sport organisations, this will help improve the health and wellbeing of older Australians and reduce the burden on the health budget.

The Coalition Government is committed to reducing drowning at Australia’s beaches, rivers and waterways, as well as improving safety on our snow fields. Funding of $48.5 million will be provided over four years to the Water and Snow Safety Program and will give organisations the ongoing funding they need to do their vital work, including buying rescue and safety equipment and teaching children to swim and survive.

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