



Thursday 9 January 2020

## Rural doctors look to support bushfire affected communities

In response to the towns and communities affected by the devastating Australian bushfires this summer, rural doctors have reached out to the relevant authorities to offer assistance and support.

Both the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), have said that there were many doctors looking to provide what help they could during and after the disaster.

“We have rural doctors right around the country offering to help their colleagues in these communities as best they can,” said Dr John Hall, RDAA President.

“It is important to note that as time goes by, after people return home and deal with the aftermath, in the weeks, months and years that follow there will be increased demand for medical relief to be provided.

“Ongoing health services are required that are able to meet community needs, particularly in the area of mental health and other health issues that may be exacerbated by the loss of homes, property, animals or livestock, family members, income or other trauma.

“Our medical colleagues in these areas will also be in need of support over the same time frame.

“In addition to dealing with the increased needs of their community, they may also have been personally impacted, with their own homes, family and livelihoods affected.

“The Rural Workforce Agencies (RWA) are doing a great job coordinating the respite medical relief effort, and we encourage any doctor willing to assist to make contact with their local RWA who will be coordinating locum support for GP practices and hospitals in the affected areas, particularly further down the track,” Dr Hall said.

“If you are a medical practitioner in one of the affected areas and are having trouble accessing necessary supplies, or your practice has been affected by fires and you need equipment, contact your local disaster management agencies.

“These networks can ensure you receive priority assistance, particularly in regards to logistics with consideration to road closures, and availability of ground or air transport.”

ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said that both ACRRM and RDAA had reached out to Minister for Health Greg Hunt, and his staff, who have been consistently available and taken action in response to calls regarding members requests as the situation unfolded.

“We thank the Minister for his attention, and for listening to the suggestions that were coming from the ground at the time.

“It is very gratifying to have a Health Minister that is open to suggestions, and willing to talk the issues through in the timely matter, over the holiday period,” Dr McPhee said. “The road to recovery will be a long one for these communities, and while there are significant resources put on the ground during the event itself, and in the immediate recovery period, our members and these communities will continue to need support and assistance into the longer term.

“We ask all Australians not to forget that as the ash settles, the problems remain and the help is still needed.

“In the coming weeks and months we will work with members to reflect on the challenges, how our response can be improved and how we can ensure we are mobilising resources, including doctors, to meet community needs in times of natural disaster.

“RDAA and ACRRM have a joint position statement, *[The role of the rural GP in disaster response and pre-hospital care](#)*, which will be evolved following this feedback,” Dr McPhee said.

“If you are a member of either RDAA or ACRRM and in need of assistance, member support is available by contacting the RDAA National Office on 02 6239 7730 or the ACRRM National Office on 1800 223 226.”

**Available for interview:**

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