



Joint media release

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Resources needed to make rural COVID-19 ready

Peak rural medical organisations are calling for an urgent allocation of resources to ensure their communities are COVID-19 ready.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) have said that the window of opportunity to supply rural, regional and remote Australia was rapidly closing.

“As doctors across Australia gear up for an influx of coronavirus patients, they are already reporting a major shortage of PPE in both the general practices and hospitals,” **RDAA President Dr John Hall said.**



“We know everyone is working hard to secure more, but we need to make sure that some is quarantined for rural areas and it doesn’t all just get allocated to the larger centres.

“This allocation needs urgent attention, because if the health system becomes over-burdened by the demand, the window to address this shortage will have closed.

ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said that as coronavirus starts to gain a foothold in rural Australia we are going to need to keep our health workforce protected and coronavirus ready.



“Already general practices are advising they are down to a week’s supply of PPE, and some are reporting that their local hospital is refusing to provide them with supplies while they await their order,” Dr McPhee said.

“If general practices are not able to protect their clinicians or if they get sick because of a lack of PPE, the patients will be moved up to the hospital, placing a huge burden on the hospital system, which is exactly what we are trying to avoid.

“We welcome the news that more masks have arrived and will be made available to the PHNs, however full PPE is also needed, including gowns and face shields for example, in order to adequately protect our health workers when performing more invasive procedures and testing.”

RDAA President Dr Hall has said that all health care providers need to share the available resources.

“We’ve been asking shoppers not to hoard supplies, and the same goes for hospitals,” Dr Hall said.

“We need the state hospitals to work with their local GPs to help them continue to provide care in their practices... if that means providing them with PPE, then do it.

“Private hospitals are also sitting on a supply of PPE as part of their operating theatre capacity, but is that where we really need it at this very moment? I think not.

“We have heard that some private hospitals have offered their resources to the state to assist in the response to COVID-19.

“This is incredibly encouraging and we ask all private hospitals to do the same to help out in the emergency response.”

RDAA and ACRMM are also calling on governments to cancel elective surgery for category 3-5 patients in public and private hospitals, to free up both supplies and workforce to cope with the COVID-19 demand.

“Western Australia and some Queensland hospitals have already done this, and it is critical that other states follow their example,” Dr Hall said.

“We need to be doing everything we can to free up capacity – whether that be beds, supplies or man power – to cope with the coming influx of patients.

“The need for ventilators will not just be in cities it will be in rural towns as well. There are many GP Anaesthetists who have the skills to provide care to these patients in their rural hospitals.

“We know retrieval services will be under significant pressure and having local access to ventilators is going to be key to giving rural patients quality care and the best outcome possible.

“Rural communities cannot be left behind. Patients should not be disadvantaged just because they live in the bush,” Dr Hall said.

“Governments across all states, as well as federally, need to make sure that adequate supplies and equipment are allocated to keep our rural general practices and hospitals able to provide care throughout the coming crisis.”

A high resolution photo of Dr John Hall is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

A high resolution photo of Dr Ewen McPhee is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

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