



**Media release**  
**Wednesday 25 March 2020**

## **Rural doctors welcome suspension of elective surgery to meet COVID-19 demand**

Australia's peak rural medical organisations have welcomed an announcement by the Prime Minister that most elective surgery in public and private hospitals will be suspended, as the nation's health sector increases its preparedness for COVID-19.

All elective surgery, other than category 1 and urgent category 2 cases, will be suspended from midnight tonight.

The decision is in line with requests made to the Federal Government by the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and other medical organisations.

**ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said:** "Our unequivocal advice was that elective surgery should be suspended to free up medical supplies and health professionals to cope with growing COVID-19 demand.

"This is a very sensible decision that will assist rural hospitals and health services to meet the incredible challenges ahead.

"It will free up more health professionals, hospital beds, medical supplies and ventilators, all of which will be desperately needed in the days and months ahead.

"The urgent need for all these resources in rural practices, rural hospitals and health services, to care for what inevitably will be a growing number of COVID-19 patients, cannot be underestimated.

"COVID-19 isn't just a city problem – it will spread to the bush, and it will impact many more people in rural and remote communities. It is only a matter of time.

"Our federal and state governments and health departments need to ensure local rural health services are well supported and ready for that, and today's decision is another step in that direction."

**RDAA President, Dr John Hall, said:** "ACRRM and RDAA have been working incredibly hard with our governments and health departments to ensure they are aware of the desperate need for more resources in our rural hospitals and practices at this very trying time.

"We will need more ventilators in rural hospitals, and we will probably need to utilise both public and private rural hospitals for COVID-19 patients in the coming months.

"We will need more GP anaesthetists, specialist anaesthetists, Rural Generalists, GPs, other clinicians, nurses, and other hospital staff.

"We will need ready access to retrieval services, we will need more personal protective equipment (PPE) for our frontline healthcare staff, and we will need more test kits.

"Suspending most elective surgery will help free up all these resources for the mammoth task ahead.

"However, it will still not be enough to meet anticipated demand in our rural and remote communities.

"RDAA and ACRRM will continue to engage with our governments and health departments on a daily basis to ensure the needs of rural and remote Australians are being heard and met in relation to this crisis.

“We thank them for heeding our call on this critical issue.”

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**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>

**Available for interview:**

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