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## **Rural incentives will see more GPs in the bush**

Health care in Australia's regions received a shot in the arm tonight with the announcement of the Rural Incentive Package that will see a significant boost in general practitioner numbers in the bush, said Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) CEO Mr David Butt

"This is a superb package for encouraging doctors to work not just in the rural areas of Australia, where incentives already exist, but in the often overlooked outer metropolitan areas that have also long been areas of medical workforce shortage," he said. "It provides excellent opportunities for general practice and Divisions to recruit and retain more doctors in areas of doctor shortages."

More than 2400 doctors will now be eligible for incentive payments and those practicing in very remote areas could almost double their retention payments.

"This is a great opportunity to get more GPs out to the bush and improve the service options for those communities, and ultimately the health outcomes. We know rural people are not receiving equal care and this will go some way to redress that imbalance," Mr Butt said.

The package offers doctors up to \$120,000 to move from major centres to very remote areas, with retention benefits of up to \$47,000 after five years of service.

"In addition, those young general practitioners who are leaving the education system owing significant amounts will be able to reduce their HECS debt repayment from five to two years if serving in very remote areas," Mr Butt said.

The program means almost 500 communities, including places such as Hobart and Darwin, will for the first time be eligible for rural/remote incentives.

"This package also considers doctors who are often the backbone of medical service delivery in Australia, the overseas trained doctor (OTD). These doctors will now be able to halve their obligation to work in an area of workforce shortage depending on how remotely they practice," Mr Butt explained.

Divisions of general practice have long advocated for their local OTDs in rural and remote Australia, offering support services, community liaison and educational support.

"This is a role a number of divisions take on because their communities and their GPs need it, and with more GPs heading out of the cities to practice, it is no doubt one they will continue to develop," Mr Butt said.

**For media interviews please phone AGPN Communications Manager Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190**