



NATIONAL RURAL  
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25 February 2011

Mr Andrew McGowan  
Inquiry Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Infrastructure and Communications  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: [ic.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ic.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Mr McGowan

### **Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network**

Thank you for your letter of 18 February 2011 to Dr Jenny May, Chairperson, regarding a presentation by the National Rural Health Alliance at the public hearing to be held on 4 March 2011. The Alliance will be pleased to provide a full written submission to complement its presentation at that time. Meanwhile this letter provides a short summary of some of the key points we would like to make.

Investments in the National Broadband Network must ensure that all people, wherever they live, have access to the same high level of broadband as others in the nation, available to them at the same price and delivered by whatever means is most effective for each particular area. Fast and affordable broadband will be expected and required by future generations of citizens - including health professionals considering moving to rural and remote areas - as an important natural right.

For fast, effective and affordable broadband to contribute to improved health outcomes for people who live in rural and remote communities, key principles for functionality will include:

- high speed for timely exchange of high quality images or detailed data for real time interaction between the parties online;
- sufficient bandwidth for reliable exchange of quality images, detailed data and real time interactions;
- low latency across internet, public health intranet and home connections;

- universally available - the people who are in most need of remote health care and support are those who live most remotely or are isolated by poor health and/or inadequate communications;
- reliable and efficient technical interfaces, with minimal downtime or delays;
- practical and affordable for end users to connect to the NBN and maintain and upgrade their connections over time;
- applications and opportunities for NBN for health should be widely promoted and accessible.

Some practical health care examples will be discussed in terms of the functionality required of the NBN for emergency, primary care and home use. The role of NBN in health workforce development, including education and training, attraction and retention of health professionals and ongoing continuing professional development will also be considered.

The broader contribution of the NBN to improving the sustainability of rural and remote communities and thereby the social determinants of health means that all the other criteria for the inquiry are relevant to health outcomes as well.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Gregory  
Executive Director