

RACGP welcomes funding for Lismore and surrounding health services

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Royal Australian College of GPs

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has warmly welcomed grant funding from the federal and NSW governments to boost healthcare services in Lismore and the Northern Rivers region in NSW.

Federal Health and Aged Care Minister Mark Butler, federal Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health Emma McBride and NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard have heeded [urgent calls](#) from the RACGP and other health groups to [announce](#) that \$5 million will be provided to local health service providers.

RACGP President Dr Nicole Higgins welcomed the announcement.

"It's positive news that the federal and NSW governments have come together to provide this welcome boost for healthcare services in the region," she said.

"The people in this area have been through so much in recent years. By providing additional support to essential healthcare services in Lismore and surrounding communities still recovering from the devastating floods, we can help ensure patients get the care they need when they need it. That includes routine general practice care, management of chronic conditions like diabetes and asthma, prescriptions for medications as well as vaccinations and mental health support."

RACGP NSW and ACT Chair Professor Charlotte Hespe said the funding could not come at a more important time.

"The floods late last year caused immense damage to primary care services in Lismore and Northern Rivers communities, including practices, dental surgeries, and a pharmacy, and many of these services were also hit by previous floods," she said.

"In the last few years, the flooding has been of such a scale that out of almost 70 local primary care providers, 58 practices, or close to 9 out of 10, reported some level of flood damage. Healthcare services lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment as well as infrastructure damage with some premises almost completely gutted.

"Without additional support, it's very difficult for these providers to return to full-scale operation and help patients in need. This grant funding will provide much-needed assistance so that they can continue to deliver healthcare services, but I must stress that for many services they will still be a long way from a position that ensures long-term viability.

"The last thing we want is for these health services to throw their hands in the air and close their doors for good. Patients need timely access to high-quality healthcare more than ever before, including people who are experiencing mental health issues in the wake of the floods."

RACGP Rural Chair Dr Michael Clements also backed the funding announcement.

"Resilient communities recovering from natural disaster certainly deserve a helping hand," he said.

"Looking ahead, we must keep in mind that natural disasters, including floods and bushfires, will become not only more frequent but also more intense as climate change intensifies. So, governments must be prepared to get behind affected communities and ensure healthcare workers have the resources and support they need to get on with the job. When people have lost their homes, businesses and loved ones and have experienced trauma - they need access to healthcare without delay or hassle.

"My message to all patients and healthcare workers in Lismore is that you are not forgotten, and we will continue fighting for you. Today's announcement is a small but important step forward as the local area continues to recover."

Further details of the announcement:

- funding will be distributed in grants for general practices, allied health (including mental health), dental practices, pharmacies, private specialists, pathology providers, drug and alcohol treatment services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in Lismore
- grants of up to \$150,000 will be available, with provisions to consider applications from providers with exceptional circumstances above that threshold.
- funding for the grants will be provided to the North Coast Primary Health Network (PHN), Healthy North Coast. Further information on how to apply for a grant can be found on the Healthy North Coast website and eligible providers are encouraged to contact Healthy North Coast today.

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