



# Jillian Skinner MP

## Minister for Health Minister for Medical Research

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### MEDIA RELEASE

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Wednesday 27 March, 2013

#### **MINISTER APPOINTS RURAL HEALTH COMMITTEE**

Health Minister Jillian Skinner today announced the appointment of members to the NSW Government's first rural health advisory committee.

Mrs Skinner said the 20-member Ministerial Advisory Committee for Rural Health - which will meet for the first time in Coffs Harbour tomorrow - will advise her on ways to improve patient care in rural NSW.

"Since coming to Government, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have made their commitment to rural health clear – we want to ensure patients in our country areas receive quality care, closer to home," Mrs Skinner said.

"My decision to create a Ministerial Advisory Committee for Rural Health forms part of this commitment."

Mrs Skinner said the 20 members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Rural Health with a wide range of experience in medicine, nursing, allied health, academia, administration and management.

The committee will be co-chaired by Lismore surgeon Associate Professor Austin Curtin and the NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health, Melinda Pavey, who will work with committee members to develop strategies to enhance health services in rural and regional NSW.

"In the two years since becoming Health Minister, I have travelled the state to visit our rural and regional hospitals and community health services and meet local doctors, nurses and staff to see how best to develop our health system," Mrs Skinner said.

"In each hospital I visit, I have the pleasure of meeting dedicated, hard-working staff who strive for the best for rural and regional patients by developing local strategies to solve local issues.

"I remain inspired by these local solutions and I look forward to highlighting them during these advisory committee meetings."

Mrs Pavey said the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Rural Health will meet with the Health Minister several times a year.

Discussions at tomorrow's inaugural meeting will focus on country health workforce issues, relationships with NSW Ambulance, e-Health and technology in rural hospitals, as well as the development of the NSW Rural Health Plan.

“The committee is looking forward to meeting with Minister Skinner regularly to work together to forge new pathways and ensure best care for rural and regional patients, families and carers,” Mrs Pavey said.

Mrs Skinner said since being elected in 2011, the NSW Government had shown its commitment to the people of rural and regional NSW by:

- **Rebuilding hospitals** - including Wagga Wagga (\$270m), Tamworth (\$220m), Bega (\$170m), Port Macquarie (\$110m), Lismore (\$80m), Kempsey (\$80m), Dubbo (\$79m).
- **Delivering health care closer to home** – Gundagai, Manilla and Werris Creek Multi-Purpose Services (MPS) have all been delivered with Gulgong and Lockhart under construction;
- **Planning for the future** – Byron Bay Hospital, Maitland Region Hospital, Kempsey Hospital redevelopment, Peak Hill MPS, Lachlan Health Service and Lismore Hospital Stage 3 are all in the planning pipeline;
- **Recruiting nurses** - more than 1800 extra nurses in rural and regional hospitals since the election;
- **Recruiting and training doctors** - including a record number of interns in communities such as Coffs Harbour (19), Dubbo (12), Gosford (36), John Hunter in Newcastle (52), Lismore (13), Orange (15), Port Macquarie (16), Tamworth (16), Tweed Heads (18), Wagga Wagga (20), Wollongong (46), Wyong (25);
- **IPTAAS** - the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme has been reformed to make it easier for patients and their families to submit claim forms and receive benefits;
- **Rural Generalist Program** - launched in March, this program provides career pathways for new doctors to become rural General Practitioners (GPs) with additional advanced skills in at least one clinical discipline.