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## **Rural health must be integral in health services review**

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network today welcomed an announcement of a comprehensive review of health services in New Zealand.

The NZRGPN is the national network representing the staff of rural medical practices across New Zealand.

“A comprehensive review of the delivery of health and disability services is timely,” said NZRGPN Chief Executive Dalton Kelly. “This review must be comprehensive and wide-ranging, taking into account the full range of communities and health service providers across New Zealand.

“We welcome the Review and will look to participate fully in it on behalf of the medical professionals who are delivering outstanding health services to rural communities, often under increasingly difficult conditions.”

Dalton Kelly said the NZRGPN would be looking to ensure core rural health issues were well-represented in the review, including adequate training of sufficient volumes of rural doctors and nurses, adequate funding of rural emergency first responder services, and the provision of palliative care in rural communities.

“It’s easy for people to forget that rural communities are struggling to access equitable health care services relative to urban centres. It’s harder to attract doctors and nurses to rural communities, doctors on average are closer to retirement age than doctors in urban centres and they are generally working longer and increasing hours.

“The boom in tourism is also something which absolutely must be reflected in the review. While a great thing for the New Zealand economy, it is projected that five million tourists per annum will visit in New Zealand by the middle of next decade with up to half visiting a national park.

“The classic New Zealand tourism experience is accessed through rural New Zealand and already booming tourism numbers are placing great strain on already stretched rural health services,” he said.

“This Review is a very positive development that we fully support. It has started to feel as though the country’s health needs, particularly in a rural context, were in competition with each other. A comprehensive review should deliver clarity around the health services all New Zealanders need, including in the engine room of the New Zealand economy – rural New Zealand.”

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