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'Rural Proofing' vital to protecting rural communities

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network today welcomed a refreshed 'rural proofing' policy that will ensure rural communities are 'at the heart of policy making across government'.

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

"We're very encouraged with the announcement from the Hon. Damien O'Connor at Fieldays today, said NZRGPN Chief Executive, Dalton Kelly.

"There are increasing pressures on rural communities, particularly in relation to equitable access to services. This commitment to ensuring rural communities are actively considered in policy development will reduce the risk of rural communities being overlooked in the discussions that matter most."

Dalton Kelly said in the context of rural health, rural communities were at particular risk of not having the same access to primary healthcare as their urban counterparts.

"Already New Zealand is struggling to train, attract and retain rural medical staff, rural emergency medical services are suffering from significant underfunding, and the impact of New Zealand's tourism boom is placing increasing pressures on rural health services.

"Under today's announcement we can expect any health policy initiative or review to actively consider and engage with the rural health sector which will be welcomed by rural health professionals across the country.

"Similarly, tourists to New Zealand access the New Zealand tourism experience almost exclusively through rural New Zealand. We should expect the rural sector, including its health services, to be actively involved in considerations around how best to manage and resource tourism in New Zealand."

Dalton Kelly said the announcement was a timely acknowledgement of the importance of rural New Zealand.

"Rural New Zealand is the engine of the New Zealand economy. We need to protect and value our rural communities and, as today's announcement states, ensure equitable access to services and opportunities for Kiwis living in rural communities."

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