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## **CONNECTIVITY – A Rural Health and Wellbeing issue**

Linking rural health centres to broadband and a rapid reduction in mobile “black spots” around rural New Zealand are key areas of focus for the Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHANZ).

These critical areas were identified by the organisation following the 2016 Rural Connectivity Symposium.

RHANZ is a peak organisation with 42 member organisations, all interested in the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

RHANZ Chairperson, Dr Jo Scott-Jones, says access is the vital issue.

“If rural issues can be summarised in a single word it would be ‘access’. Improved connectivity enables specialised health services to reach out into rural communities and for patients to link from home into their GP clinics. With rapid internet in rural communities we could develop and deliver more innovative health solutions with greater efficiency,” he says.

Mobile black spots, especially along state highways in rural NZ, create unacceptable risks to the safety of tourists and residents.

“People working rurally are often required to work in isolation and in remote areas, being able to communicate is an important safety issue.

“Prospective staff members in both health services and other industries are often reluctant to move to rural areas where connectivity standards are sub-standard. This has impacts on the recruitment and retention of rural health providers into the regions.”

RHANZ wants all of New Zealand to have access to affordable, reliable internet and mobile coverage and says there is a clear need for increased investment to achieve this for people living rurally.

“We applaud the government’s initiatives to enhance connectivity in rural areas, we just want it sooner,” Dr Scott-Jones says.

- The Rural Connectivity Symposium 2016 was a joint venture of TUANZ, NZ Young Farmers and RHANZ. A report containing key insights is also attached.

### **For more information contact:**

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### **Note to Editors:**

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand was established in May 2012 and represents a united voice from across multiple rural sector organisations. Its aim is to provide solutions and influence policy affecting the health and wellbeing of rural communities [www.rhaanz.org.nz](http://www.rhaanz.org.nz).

Current members: <http://www.rhaanz.org.nz/membership/current-members/>