



Fight for rural health a key election issue

March 19, 2017

New Zealand is potentially at risk of damaging its economy, unless the government does not act on improving rural health services, a national rural leader says.

Michelle Thompson, chief executive of the Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHAANZ), says rural New Zealanders do not receive equitable health services. She says Kiwis in cities receive far better health support than in rural areas.

The RHAANZ met politicians in Parliament this week and pleaded for a much better health deal for rural people.

“Agriculture and tourism are the powerhouses of our economy. Each year, more than two and a half million tourists visit rural New Zealand. In 2011-2012, \$40 billion, or 19 percent of GDP, was generated directly or indirectly by the agri-food sector,” Thompson says.

“If the spending power of these people is considered, then the contribution of the agri-food sector is \$53 billion, or one dollar in every four dollars spent in the economy. Yet the health and social services for this population are under increasing and significant pressure to deliver.

“We met with politicians from all the main parties this week and all were concerned for rural health. They are keen to follow this through and some have asked for further meetings before the election, because this has become a key election issue.

“More importantly, we hope to meet with Ministers of Health and Primary Industries as soon as possible, because the rural population of more than 600,000 needs easier access to modern health services and facilities, for the economic safeguard of our country. We need equitable health services for rural people. Currently we don’t have this and we urgently need to change this for rural people.

“New Zealand’s main producers live in the country and they are the economic backbone and financial heartland of our nation. So, it matters vitally to all New Zealanders that rural people have good health services and good health outcomes.

“Our appeal to government is a call to bring health services closer to home and timely transfer to emergency services when needed. We said we need a more vibrant rural health and social service workforce. We need social and technical connectivity in all rural areas. We are asking for rural health research.

“We need to make our small towns liveable so that people want to come and live there and stay. If we can make our rural communities vibrant again many of our issues will be solved,” Thompson says.

For more information contact RHAANZ chair Dr Martin London on 027 4641191 or Make Lemonade editor-in-chief Kip Brook on 0275 030188.

Photo: RHAANZ chief executive Michelle Thompson