

28 June 2024

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**NRHA response to question on notice from the Standing Committee on Community Affairs References Committee at its recent hearing 13 June 2024**

Dear Committee Secretary,

At the hearing held at Parliament House, Canberra on 13 June 2024, The National Rural Health Alliance (the Alliance) accepted the following three questions on notice from Senator Pratt:

***Senator PRATT: Have you got any data yet on vaccination rates in regional areas versus metropolitan areas?***

*While there is some data currently publicly available via the Department of Health and Aged Care's website on vaccination via geographic measures, it is not provided in a format that is very easy to draw inferences from about access across the country. Data on remote and very remote areas is not available.*

***Senator PRATT: Thank you. Could you take on notice for me this question on excess mortality—which is what this inquiry is about. Do you know whether there have, as yet, been any trends around excess mortality in relation to all of the other contributors to excess mortality in rural and regional Australia, versus the metro populations?***

*As the National Rural Health Alliance has stated in its submission to the Committee, we have seen instances of increased seriousness in retrievals post-COVID through reports including the Royal Flying Doctors Service's Best for the Bush report. However, this evidence does not break down in relation to metropolitan populations.*

***Senator PRATT: Can you give us some advice on notice about the extent to which there's any evidence to show that disinformation campaigns are likely to have more traction in communities where there's less access to health care because people don't have the same level of health literacy as a result of that historical lack of access to services. Thank you.***

*When we discuss health literacy and disinformation, it is important to ensure that accurate information is provided by governments that is equitable across the country and in formats relevant to particular populations. This makes it important to make data sets on excess mortality by remoteness available to the public and at no cost. While there is no data on how effective disinformation campaigns were by remoteness, there are some*

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*studies that have identified risk factors of lower health literacy being linked to misperceptions about the COVID-19 vaccination. On issues related to health and safety it is also crucial that media provide evidence-based information, rather than advertorial or promoting misinformation to sensationalise, to the public.*

The Alliance is grateful to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for all the work you are doing to ensure the recommendations from the Inquiry into Excess Mortality are implemented and lead to improvements in health access and equity.

Yours sincerely,

Susi Tegen  
Chief Executive  
National Rural Health Alliance