



Submission from the
Rural Health Education Foundation
Into the Inquiry into the
Role and Potential of the National Broadband Network

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Background

The House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications is undertaking an inquiry into the NBN that examines the following terms of reference:

- a) the delivery of government services and programs;
- b) achieving health outcomes;
- c) improving the educational resources and training available for teachers and students;
- d) the management of Australia's built and natural resources and environmental sustainability;
- e) impacting regional economic growth and employment opportunities;
- f) impacting business efficiencies and revenues, particularly for small and medium business, and Australia's export market;
- g) interaction with research and development and related innovation investments;
- h) facilitating community and social benefits; and
- i) the optimal capacity and technological requirements of a network to deliver these outcomes.

This submission from the Rural Health Education Foundation deals in particular with points (b) and (h) above.

This submission concludes (see pages 4 and 5) that the Rural Health Education Foundation as a major provider of free health education has potentially a very important role to play in developing educational content which will be of unique value to rural and remote Australians and that can be delivered by the NBN.

Background on the Rural Health Education Foundation: History, Aims, Objectives, Achievements

The Rural Health Education Foundation ("the Foundation") produces and delivers topical, high quality, evidence-based educational television and audio programs enriched by the voluntary participation of Australia's best health and medical experts. We shrink the vast distances of remote and rural Australia with a national satellite television network, the Internet, extensive DVD distribution and other broadcast services.

The Foundation plays a critical role in redressing the health inequality in rural and remote Australia by equipping rural and remote Australians with the practical knowledge vital to improving health outcomes. The Foundation's innovative interactive health and medical education TV programs keep health practitioners up to date with the latest advances, so they can provide the best possible care. The Foundation's documentary style education TV programs improve the health literacy of communities and encourage people to make better health choices.

The Foundation is unique:

- The Foundation provides free continuing education television programs to health and medical professionals all over Australia - the only organisation which does so.
- Each year, at least 50,000 health professionals and tens of thousands of health consumers watch our programs.
- The Foundation has developed and manages a dedicated satellite receiving network with more than 670 sites nationwide.
- More than 200 health and medical professional organisations and associations provide comprehensive publicity and promotions for Foundation programs.
- The Foundation receives extensive assistance from volunteers each of its satellite sites is managed by a volunteer coordinator, and each year more than 100 health and medical professionals donate their time and energies to participating as panelists and commentators in Foundation programs.
- The Foundation has developed a dynamic model for distributing its programs, including a wide range of technologies, services and materials to respond effectively to a growing and evolving audience.
- The Foundation is a tax exempt, non-profit organisation with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, and reinvests any project surpluses and donations into providing additional services for its rural and remote communities.

The Foundation was first established in 1992 to assist the educational needs of rural and remote medical practitioners. The Foundation produces and distributes more than 20 video and audio educational programs each year, and in total has produced more than 300 programs over its history, covering a wide spectrum of health and medical education issues. Most programs are conducted in an educational television panel discussion style with expert participants and featuring clinical examples. Many programs are presented live through satellite TV network and the internet and allow for viewer participation and interaction. The Foundation also produces pre-recorded and documentary style programs, all of which have obtained broadcasts on SBS TV, National Indigenous Television (NITV) and Aurora Community TV. Almost all of our services are provided free of charge to the users: the health professionals and residents of rural and remote communities.

The Foundation has fifteen staff and has two offices: an operational headquarters in Canberra and an executive and communications office in Sydney. The organisation is governed by a nine-person voluntary Board of Directors who do not receive any sitting fees for their participation and contributions. Our organisation is a deductible gift recipient, income tax exempt non-profit organisation. We receive funding for our projects from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, a large number of national health and medical organisations (Cancer Australia, Westmead Breast Cancer Institute, beyondblue, the National Heart Foundation), foundations and trusts (Perpetual Trustees, Rio Tinto Aboriginal Fund, the Ian Potter Foundation, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, etc), state governments (NSW Health), sale and educational licensing of programs, sponsorships, and donations from individuals and organisations.

Rural Health Education Foundations TV and Audio Programs

The range and depth of the Foundation's programs is evidenced by our work during the past year. During 2010 the Foundation produced two major series of four programs each on

Diabetes Guidelines and Musculoskeletal Clinical Guidelines. We also produced two more programs in our long-running Indigenous health ‘Strong Series’; a set of ten audio programs on Diabetes; and a range of sixteen other programs broadcast by satellite television and in many cases also webcast. We filmed case studies in thirteen different locations around Australia as far apart as Perth and Cairns. We also developed four major DVD and audio CD projects.

The quality of the Foundation’s programs was confirmed in November 2009 when our program *Recovery from Trauma: What Works* undertaken in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne - won a “Freddie” award at the prestigious International Health and Medical Media Awards. The 29-minute program, originally produced in February 2009, was selected by the US-based judging panel as the best health education video from anywhere in the world in the Psychiatry category. We were the only organisation outside North America to win that year. The Foundation has now distributed more than 17,000 DVD copies of the PTSD programs.

During the year our program production covered a broad range of topics including end of life care, men’s health, suicide prevention, breast cancer, practice nursing, aged care assessment, acute coronary syndromes, otitis media and depression and anxiety. We also repeated a number of very popular programs on oral health, birthing in the bush, psychological trauma, eating disorders and psychotropic drugs.

For a full list of our programs and program descriptions please visit our website at <http://www.rhef.com.au/programs/>.

Delivering our Programs

We deliver our programs through a number of complementary means:

- Our national satellite network
- The internet through live webcasting, archived webstreaming, audio download podcasting and audio streaming
- DVD (23,000 DVD sets in 2009/10 alone were distributed)
- Other broadcast services (SBS, NITV, Aurora)

The Rural Health Education Foundation and the National Broadband Network

The Rural Health Education Foundation warmly welcomes the development of the National Broadband Network (NBN), and its growing ability to deliver high-speed video and audio content to rural and remote Australians. As an organisation which has used Internet delivery to rural and remote Australians for many years, we understand well and at first hand the great difficulty that many rural and remote Australians have in accessing reasonable Internet speeds.

The Rural Health Education Foundation is a major provider of rich health and medical educational video and audio “content” to rural and remote health and medical personnel and their communities. All of our programs are specifically made with an Australian rural and remote audience in mind.

The Rural Health Education Foundation already extensively utilises the Internet to supply our free educational services “on demand” and sometimes “live” - to rural and remote communities. The Foundation is thus uniquely positioned to expand and increase its educational service provision to rural and remote Australians in ways that will directly improve community benefit and improve health outcomes.

While the Foundation commenced its life as a provider of professional health and medical education, by 2005 we had commenced producing and widely distributing high-quality video-based materials which are appropriate for and widely used in educational and community contexts by health consumers. All of these video and audio materials are uniquely Australian and uniquely applicable for remote and rural residents. The fact that we are distributing about 23,000 copies of our programs on DVD each year is a good indication of their significant community demand. However, distribution which is more immediate on-demand would enable our materials to be more widely used.

The Foundation is capable of doubling or tripling the production of its health educational materials for rural and remote communities. An annual investment of as little as \$3,000,000 could see an extensive growth of these materials with consequent significant community benefit. Note that we are not only a “producer”; we are also a highly experienced “distributor” are accustomed to delivering to the “audience”, the actual user. As a non-profit organisation, we are positioned properly in the Australian community to undertake these social benefit activities. We look forward to commencing formal discussions with Government to explore the ways in which we can support and enhance the social and community benefits which will arise from the development of the National Broadband Network.

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