People who live in rural, regional and remote Australia suffer poorer health and rank lower on most health indicators, including life expectancy, than those in metropolitan areas. The Greens have a suite of initiatives that will invest back in rural and remote health and address some of these growing imbalances in spending and health outcomes.

**PRIORITISING RURAL HEALTH**

To help bolster health services in regional and rural Australia, the Greens will invest over $1 billion in rural health including:

- **$450m earmarked for rural hospitals** by boosting federal hospital funding to the states for rural and regional hospitals.
- **$200m in flexible rural infrastructure** grants to keep more clinics open longer.
- **$20m in grants for health services to provide training** in rural areas.
- **Fixing the classification system** so rural health professionals are properly remunerated according to level of remoteness
- **Funding after hours care** through Medicare Locals in rural areas to decrease the inequity in access to services.
- **Streamlining the accreditation of overseas doctors** until Australia is self-sufficient with the rural health workforce.
- **Delivering on rural mental health** by investing heavily in prevention and properly funding more mental health services in rural areas.

This investment comes on top of further Greens investments in universal dental health, aged and disability care, the NBN, and indigenous health.

**RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE**

It’s no secret that Australia faces huge challenges in attracting and keeping the health workforce it needs in rural and remote areas. Our reliance on overseas-trained doctors is a stopgap measure at best.

Fixing the rural health workforce crisis will take time. It requires incentives to get more rural students into health and to get more health students to undertake rural placements. The Greens will start by investing in the future workforce, allocating $20m for rural programs that need money for salaries, mentoring and other costs associated with training the rural workforce of tomorrow. If successful, this would become an ongoing program.

The Greens support rural quotas in Australian medical schools and will work to ensure that all graduates who seek training places outside of metropolitan areas will be able to find places.

The Greens will also continue to develop and support generalist training for rural doctors, including the Rural Generalist Pathway. The Greens will work towards having a generalist training pathway that is remunerated at similar levels to specialists.

**INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Rural practices face many challenges that their metropolitan colleagues do not, and struggle to find the resources to invest in
expanding to meet the present and future needs of the communities they serve.

A flexible $200m Rural Health Infrastructure Fund will help rural doctors expand practices and provide extra services and longer hours in rural communities, and will be used to fill other gaps in rural services. Practices that provide training facilities for medical and vocational trainees will receive priority in grants. This money will be allocated over 3 years from 2014-15.

> FAIRNESS IN ACCESS TO HOSPITALS
Health care is about more than just hospitals, but it is vital that everybody has access to quality acute care when they need it. Many people in rural and remote Australia already have to travel a significant distance to access hospital services, and many regional hospitals struggle to attract enough funding to be able to offer a full suite of hospital services including emergency departments.

The Greens will invest heavily in Australian hospitals. As part of our hospital funding policy, $450m of new money for hospitals will be earmarked for rural and regional hospitals only.

People in rural Australia find much greater difficulties in accessing services such as after-hours care. The Greens support Medicare Locals and their potential to coordinate services such after-hours care and are committed to properly funding them to carry out this work in rural areas.

> MENTAL HEALTH
There is a chronic shortage of mental health services in Australia’s rural areas. This can have serious consequences, as the impact of mental illness can be significantly worsened in the absence of access to services.

Greens Senator Penny Wright recently conducted a rural mental health services consultation tour of Australia to talk to clinicians, service providers and consumers around Australia about the need for investment in rural mental health.

The Greens will shortly announce our investment in a comprehensive rural mental health package addressing the needs for workforce and training, outreach and education.

> ORAL HEALTH
People in rural and remote Australia suffer from poor oral health due to a lack of services and the high cost barrier. The Greens are taking action on this problem. Last year the Greens secured a massive investment in dental health, including $2.7 billion to bring Medicare-style dental care to children in Family Tax Benefit A families, $225 million in flexible grants for infrastructure in rural and regional areas, and a National Partnership Agreement which will see millions of extra services performed in public clinics.

The Greens policy for universal dental care, Denticare, would remove the cost barrier that affects the oral health of many Australians in the regions. Denticare is costed at $4.87 billion over the first three years.

> AGED AND DISABILITY CARE
The Greens support DisabilityCare and the aged care reforms, “Living Longer, Living Better”, which will mean more money and services for rural and remote Australians.

> SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH
Health is about more than just doctors. Education, employment and access to basic services all have a large impact on a person’s health. In each of these areas, people in rural and remote Australia are missing out. The Greens commitment to social justice means we are willing to invest heavily in services for people in areas of disadvantage.

The Greens would invest heavily in education, with a funding boost for all schools sooner than the government plan as well as a 10% increase in university funding.

The Greens support a full roll-out of the National Broadband Network, and want it to remain in public hands so we can ensure commercial imperatives do not mean rural Australians miss out on world-class communications.

> A JUST INVESTMENT
The Greens care about health and are willing to make it a priority. We are also committed to giving those in rural and regional areas a fair go when it comes to accessing essential services. Our fully-costed election platform has over $1 billion in new spending on rural health including these initiatives. All Greens spending is matched by revenue measures including a fairer mining tax.

The Greens believe everyone, including those in rural Australia, has a right to decent health care.