



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

Tony Abbott MHR

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OBSTETRICIAN LOCUM RELIEF PILOT EXTENDED

The pilot of the Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme, which has helped to place and maintain obstetricians and gynaecologists in rural and remote areas by providing subsidised locum support, has been extended until September 2008.

The locum scheme has proven successful since its launch in July 2006, with 20 obstetricians placed in areas including Wagga Wagga, Kalgoorlie, Warrnambool, Goulburn, Nowra, Derby, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Gladstone and Sale.

The Commonwealth Government will provide more than \$500,000 to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia to continue the pilot scheme.

Obstetrics is a difficult specialist career because of the long hours, and in rural areas these hours are often even longer when travel is taken into account. Better locum services help to ease the time constraints obstetricians face, and encourages them either to maintain or to begin a career in rural areas.

Other Government initiatives to support specialist services include outreach programs to improve the availability of specialist medical services to rural and regional people, funding the development and maintenance of advanced specialist training posts in rural and regional hospitals, and programs to enable specialists working in rural areas to undertake continuing professional development.

A report by the Rural Doctors Association of Australia found that nearly 30 per cent of babies in Australia are born in rural areas, yet only 16 per cent of Australia's obstetricians practise in rural areas. The rural obstetric workforce is also ageing, with half of the obstetricians practising in rural areas due to retire within five years.

Media contact: Claire Kimball, 0413 486 926