



The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Minister for Health and Aged Care

The Hon. Mark Coulton MP

Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government

Media release

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Budget boost to Rural Bulk Billing to benefit the bush

The Morrison Government is investing more than \$65 million from 1 January 2022 to boost bulk billing rebates and provide more affordable healthcare for patients in regional, rural and remote areas.

A new, progressive incentive schedule will be applied, that increases the value of the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive (RBI) based on remoteness. This will enhance the financial viability of practices in rural and remote areas as well as reducing the gap paid by patients.

The more remote the area based on the Modified Monash model (MM), the greater the incentive payment they will receive per eligible consultation to recognise the greater challenges and cost pressures.

Federal Regional Health Minister, Mark Coulton said the Coalition Government is delivering the progressive rural bulk billing incentives in recognition of the ongoing need to provide the right incentives for the health workforce in rural, regional and remote areas.

“Australians in rural and remote areas have poorer access to and use of health services, compared to people living in metropolitan areas,” Minister Coulton said.

“The new Rural Bulk Billing Incentive will support those GPs providing services to people in greatest need and who have the lowest propensity to pay for healthcare; our government understands GPs outside of our metropolitan areas face greater cost and workforce pressures.”

Minister Coulton said the Federal Government understands GPs face greater health complexities and challenges in rural and remote areas, which is why more than 12,000 rural and remote GPs will be eligible for the higher bulk billing incentive.

“Doctors in the bush face a greater burden of responsibility, more complex care situations, and high rates of chronic disease compared with doctors in the cities, who can rely on support from other medical services and facilities,” he said.

Minister for Health and Aged Care, Greg Hunt, said Government was delivering higher bulk billing incentives for rural and remote medical practices, which would reduce out of pocket costs to patients.

“Bulk billing is an important component of the Medicare system, and outside metropolitan areas many doctors rely on the additional incentive for each consultation to help make ends meet for their clinics,” Minister Hunt said.

“While the average bulk billing rates is more than 80% across many regional, rural and remote areas, there are still more GPs in these areas who could offer bulk billing for their patients.”

Minister Coulton said the new rural bulk billing model not only recognises the work of current rural and remote doctors but will also encourage more doctors to consider a career in rural practice.

“We want to make rural Australia a career destination of choice for aspiring rural doctors,” Minister Coulton said.

“The new rural incentive rates are another key reform we have delivered to attract more doctors to the bush and further builds on the Coalition Government’s ten-year *Stronger Rural Health Strategy*.

“There isn’t a single solution to solving rural doctor shortages, that’s why the Coalition Government continues to work on a range of practical workforce, training and primary care reforms with the aim to create more sustainable community health services in rural and remote communities.”

The RBBI encourages doctors to offer medical services without out of pocket costs to vulnerable populations, including children under 16, senior Australians and concession cardholders.

Bulk-billing doctors outside metropolitan areas currently receive 150 per cent of the base BBI across the board (MM2-7). The new payment rates, based on the base BBI for metropolitan areas, will be:

- large and medium rural locations (MM 3-4) – 160 per cent of the base rate
- small rural locations (MM 5) –170 per cent of the base rate
- rural locations (MM 6) – 180 per cent of the base rate, and
- very remote locations (MM 7) – 190 per cent of the base rate.

This means, from 1 January 2022, doctors practicing in rural and remote areas will be able to receive an incentive payment of up to \$12.35 per consultation.

There is no change to the RBBI rate for doctors in MM 2 locations (150 per cent).

The RBBI is an ongoing, demand-driven, program and the introduction of the progressive incentive schedule will begin on 1 January 2022 at an estimated cost of \$65.8 million over the Forward Estimates.

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