



## Riverland services facing new interstate management?

# Health overhaul by mid-2012

**Riverland health services could soon be managed from interstate or by a single entity covering all of rural South Australia.**

Federal Health and Ageing Minister Nicola Roxon last week released a report outlining proposed boundaries for new Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCO), to be known as Medicare Locals, which will be established by mid-2012.

According to the report, the PHCOs are "expected to evolve from Divisions of General Practice" but will have "a wider remit to plan for the needs of local populations and communities".

Ms Roxon said PHCOs, part of the Federal Government's \$7.3 billion health reform agenda, will be independent legal entities set up to provide "more co-ordinated care, improved access to services and drive integration across the primary health care, hospital and aged care sectors".

Under the modelling presented, the Riverland will either be part of a single PHCO set up to manage all of rural SA, or share a PHCO zone with parts of Victoria or NSW.

In all cases, metropolitan Adelaide is covered by three PHCOs.

Riverland Division of General Practice chair, Dr Grant Baker



Federal Health and Ageing Minister Nicola Roxon

said feedback on the proposed boundaries is currently being sought.

"Under some of the models suggested for SA, the Riverland is included in PHCOs based in Victoria or NSW, with no consideration of how or where our community access their health services," he said.

"How could we be assured that the health needs of the Riverland community are considered when the decisions are made by an office in NSW or Victoria?"

"The opportunity to make sure that the Riverland community's health needs really are on the map is now and I encourage residents to have their say."

According to the report, a possible tri-state PHCO will link

the Riverland with Mildura.

"While no information on hospital flows or referrals is available, some cross border flows for specialist inpatient care are likely because Mildura is closer by road to the majority of towns in (the Riverland) than Adelaide," the report states.

"A cross border PHCO with hospital linkages to both SA and Victoria will support rapid access to acute specialist and emergency care when needed.

"The major weakness is the need for local Riverland GPs and primary health professionals to work across state boundaries where different service systems traditionally operate."

According to the report, the other proposal of a single PHCO for all of rural SA would have to overcome "a huge geographic area with diverse demography and differing rural industries".

The full report *Framework for development of Primary Health Care Organisations in Australia* is available at [www.yourhealth.gov.au/medicarelocal](http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/medicarelocal).

Submissions can be made online or in writing to the Assistant Secretary, Primary Care Practice Support Branch, MDP 1051, Department of Health and Ageing, GPO Box 9848, Canberra, ACT, 2601 up to September 30, 2010.