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RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIANS DESERVE A NATIONAL PLAN

The financial, physical and emotional survival of rural and remote Australia requires a commitment to a comprehensive long-term national strategy for economic regeneration in the bush the Uniting Church said today.

Uniting Church President, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton, said the Church's experience in working in remote Australia called it to speak up to ensure sustainable communities are not just for the 85 per cent of Australians who live in one per cent of our landmass.

"Transforming rural Australian communities into communities of hope requires national investments in health, education and infrastructure. Rural and remote Australia continues to feel the brunt of our harsh climate and of changing economic and social conditions. Poverty in the bush is disproportionately higher than in other parts of the country."

"We need a national strategy to re-build our rural communities that includes cooperation between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments across all portfolios," Rev. Drayton said.

Uniting Church Frontier Services National Director, Rosemary Young, said the agency provides families and individuals living in remote and isolated parts of Australia with health care services, family and children's support, respite care, counselling, community welfare programs and aged care services

"Our patrol ministers work across 80 per cent of the Australian landmass and we provide over 75 services to more than 15,000 families and individuals with a mix of Government and private funding.

"In this election campaign we need commitments to a national strategy where local communities are consulted about their needs, inputs and outcomes," she said.

Mrs Young said a national strategy for the bush must also review the funding formulas used in key primary service areas like health, child care and education which do not reflect the real cost of service delivery in the bush.

"The cost of providing residential aged care in Tennant Creek for example is almost twice the national average. The small number of residents, the high care needs of those who do need residential care and the difficulties of recruiting and retaining qualified staff make this an extremely costly undertaking."

"In too many areas we see funding allocations being made at urban levels for services in remote Australia. This is unrealistic and unsustainable and we need to ensure that governments adequately resource the continued development of innovative and flexible services," Mrs Young said.

**Media contacts: Gavin Melvin, Senior Communication Officer, 0417 416 674
Rosemary Young, Frontier Services, 0427 180 265**