



Steve Fielding Family First Senator for Victoria



MEDIA RELEASE
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ABOLISH HECS DEBTS FOR DOCTORS WHO GO TO REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

FAMILY FIRST applauds the Government's action to take charge of remote indigenous communities but is concerned the shortage of doctors in regional Australia could undermine the health plan.

To boost the number of doctors in indigenous communities, FAMILY FIRST proposes abolishing HECS debts for medical students who commit to work in these areas for a minimum of two years after they graduate. The scheme would be capped at 250 doctors and reviewed according to need.

HECS fees for a six-year medical degree are up to \$51,000 so the savings are substantial.

This is a way of immediately directing more doctors to the areas of greatest need and could be adapted to other parts of regional Australia in the future. There are more than 1700 medical graduates each year and this encourages them to think seriously about starting their careers treating Aboriginal people whose health situation is dire.

These new doctors would join more experienced health professionals performing vital health work such as comprehensive health checks on the almost 24,000 Aboriginal children aged under 16.

FAMILY FIRST also calls on the Government to increase the total number of medical places.

An April 2007 report by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee found there were 11,151 eligible applicants for medical studies but only 3,036 offers. This is nonsense, given we are crying out for more doctors, not just in remote indigenous communities, but across regional Australia.

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