



## **AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS JOINS CALL FOR SUPPORT OF MEDICAL PRACTICES AFFECTED BY NORTHERN RIVERS FLOODS**

**16 SEPTEMBER 2022**

The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) has joined the call by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and NSW Rural Doctors Network for more support to be made available to medical practitioners whose practices were destroyed in the Northern Rivers Floods six months ago.

Access to care was already extremely limited in rural and regional areas like northern New South Wales before the floods.

At a time when there is widespread acknowledgement of the desperate need to get more doctors into regional areas, the Federal and state governments must provide meaningful and urgent financial support to those doctors already there.

That is why ACD is joining the call for a flood support payment to be made available immediately to those non-government healthcare businesses that were affected by the Northern Rivers Floods in February 2022.

Dr Ken Gudmundsen, the only practising dermatologist in Lismore, has been waiting more than six months for a meaningful response from the Federal and state government to enable him to restore his practice.

Dr Gudmundsen's dermatology practice was completely destroyed in the floods in February 2022 and is now at risk of having to cease practising in the region.

"My practice lost everything in the floods, from computers, specialised diagnostic and treatment equipment, to beds, furniture and books" Dr Gudmundsen said. "The walls, floors and ceilings of the practice had to be removed and the site remained without power for almost 4 months".

Due to the severity of the damage to his practice, Dr Gudmundsen was unable to see patients for 3 months after the floods. He has started seeing patients again at a local clinic however, space is limited. Each day he is only able to see half as many patients as before.

Limited space and lack of equipment means patients can no longer receive the full suite of services Dr Gudmundsen usually provides. Practice staff have had to cut their hours and there is the risk of losing their valuable expertise altogether. "After all I have lost, I hope I don't lose my nursing and administrative staff as well" Dr Gudmundsen said.

The impact of reduced service capacity on a community already traumatised by the floods has been significant. Doctors like Dr Gudmundsen have done everything they can to keep their services open and continue to care for their patients, however, they are now at breaking point financially, physically and mentally.

"Operating for three months with no income and now half income for the foreseeable future, combined with the huge expenses to rebuild and reequip clinics is just not sustainable" Dr Gudmundsen said.



Compounding the psychological impact, these doctors have been forced to take out loans and seek whatever equipment donations they can from colleagues but this is insufficient given the scale of the recovery relief needed to get back on their feet.

Six months after the flood, the support from the Federal or state government for these practices has been underwhelming. It is looking increasingly uncertain that Dr Gudmundsen will be able to continue his dermatology practice in a town that is already desperately underserved.

The Northern Rivers communities have already suffered too much hardship to then lose one of the very few dermatologists in the area. The ACD joins the AMA in supporting a proposal developed by the Rural Doctors Network for a flood support payment to be made available immediately to those non-government healthcare businesses that were affected by the northern rivers floods in February 2022.

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### **About the Australasian College of Dermatologists**

The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) is the sole medical college accredited by the Australian Medical Council (AMC) for the training and continuing professional development of medical practitioners in the speciality of dermatology. Dermatologists specialise in the diagnosis, treatment and management of all skin diseases and conditions, including skin cancer.

As the national peak membership organisation, we represent over 590 dermatologist Fellows (FACD) and 100 trainees. We are the leading authority in Australia for dermatology, providing information, advocacy and advice to patients, communities, government and other stakeholders on skin health and dermatological practice. Our vision is for the highest standard of skin health and dermatology care to be available to all patients and communities.

### **Further Media enquiries:**

[mediaenquiries@dermcoll.edu.au](mailto:mediaenquiries@dermcoll.edu.au)