Next Government is urged to reverse GP funding cuts

Cuts in health funding that could see GP surgeries close across Cumbria must be reversed, says ACTion with communities in Cumbria.

ACT is promoting a call by its national body ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), which says the changes to the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee (MPIG) will hit the most vulnerable rural residents.

ACRE – the national voice for England’s network of rural community councils – is calling on the next Government to reinstate the funding in its 2015 election manifesto. The manifesto is based on the rural intelligence ACRE collects from its 38 county members, including ACT, who reach 52,000 grassroots organisations nationwide.

ACT Chief Executive Lorrainne Smyth said: “The loss of any surgery in an isolated rural area will cause hardship to elderly and vulnerable residents. Rural communities are home to 57.5% of all older people in Cumbria and with the percentage of over-85s set to double in the next 20 years, provision of local healthcare for our ageing population is crucial.

“The closure of surgeries will pose problems for older people who may face difficulties in getting to appointments further afield. In rural areas, 35% of pensioner households have no access to a car. With cuts in public transport, they are often forced to rely on friends, family and overstretched volunteers.”

MPIG is a top-up payment given to some general practices since 2004. In 2014/15, NHS England began a seven-year plan to phase out the payment in a review of how GP surgeries are paid for their services. The move led to widespread objections from GPs and the BMA (British Medical Association). Hawkshead and Coniston surgeries had national coverage for their campaign.
ACRE’s Head of Rural Insight Nick Chase said: “The ACRE Network is calling on the next Government to reinstate MPIG for rural surgeries.

“A survey of our Network in 2014 showed that the withdrawal of MPIG would hit rural GPs hard. For instance, our ACRE Network member in Devon reported that at least 10% of rural surgeries faced closure and in Cornwall, 20% would lose significant income if these changes went ahead.

“Whilst there are those who say that the MPIG is inequitable and requires a rethink, the entire withdrawal of the funding is not the way forward.

“The number of GP surgeries closing has increased significantly over the past 12 months. NHS England is aware of 98 surgeries that could face closure as a direct result of withdrawal of MPIG.”

The ACRE manifesto, which sets out 12 key rural challenges to the next Government, is available at www.acre.org.uk.

- Ends -

Further press information available from:

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Notes to Editors:

Tim Farron MP presented a Bill to Parliament to require provision of General Practitioner surgeries in certain rural areas; and for connected purposes on 21 October 2014. This bill is due for a second reading on 6 March 2015.

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT)

- ACT is the community development organisation and Rural Community Council for Cumbria.
- ACT champions community and rural issues and supports communities to plan for their future, develop projects, work with others, and influence and change policy.
- ACT’s work focuses on helping people and communities achieve their aspirations; we provide practical advice and support and deliver training. Through a variety of partnerships we are also able to represent the interests of communities locally, regionally, and nationally.
- ACT is registered in England as Voluntary Action Cumbria, Charity Registration Number 1080875, Company Number 3957858.
- For more information, please visit ACT’s website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk