



## NEWS

# We are Australia's least healthy region

By **Ben Brennan**

**SOUTHERN** South Australians suffer more long-term health issues than any other group in Australia, according to a new report.

The National Health Performance Authority's MyHealthyCommunities report says the South Country SA Medicare Local area has the highest percentage of residents, at 60 per cent, living with long-term health conditions in Australia.

Inner West Sydney showed the lowest rate of long-term ailments with 34pc.

The report identified cost as one of the main barriers, while between 16pc and 35pc of people across Australia identified waiting times for specialist appointments as unacceptably long.

Bridge Clinic doctor Martin Altmann said it was important to remember the study focussed on people's own views of their health and that there were many factors contributing to the region's statistics.

"The report asks peo-

ple to comment on health

status or reflect on health status so it could be a really complicated combination of current health and socio-economic status," he said.

According to Dr Altmann, higher rates of smoking were traditionally associated with regional areas and could also prove a factor in poorer outcomes.

The fall out from the crippling millenium drought could also have contributed to the result.

However, he said upgrades to the Bridge Clinic, with the first stage expected to be completed by September, would make it easier to cope with demand around Murray Bridge and help attract more doctors to the area.

Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said he was concerned that limited access to care was leading to poorer health for residents, particularly in the Murray Mallee.

"I think the issue we have is about the distance to health care," Mr Pederick said.

"The problem we have, especially in the Mallee, is retaining and attract-

ing doctors ... no sooner do we attract one than they've left."

He said Pinnaroo had been without a full-time doctor for years while GPs from Mannum were now covering Karoonda.

Mr Pederick said there was some good news for the area such as the Flinders University regional training scheme, which

had the potential to help bring more doctors to the area permanently, while the ongoing expansion of Bridge Clinic was also a good sign.

But Dr Altmann and Mr Pederick said regardless of their situation, people should put their health first and not use inconvenience as an excuse to avoid a trip to the doctor.



**Good signs:** Bridge Clinic doctor Martin Altmann says expansions to the clinic could help attract doctors to the region as a new report says southern country South Australia has the nation's highest rate of long-term health conditions.