



Budget will help deliver COAG reforms

11 May 2010

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) welcomed the additional funding for ehealth and primary care in tonight's Budget but warned that more needed to be done to integrate primary care and hospitals to ensure people with chronic and complex conditions can receive coordinated and comprehensive care.

The AHHA is the peak national body representing public hospitals, area health services, community health centres and public aged care providers.

"AHHA welcomes the Government's commitment in key areas of health care, including ehealth and primary care. These measures are vital to progress the reforms agreed by COAG last month," Ms Prue Power, Executive Director, said today.

"In particular, we are pleased that the Government has responded to AHHA's call for additional funding for ehealth. Personal electronic health records will help deliver a higher level of safety and better communication within our health system.

"However, AHHA notes that the comprehensive implementation of ehealth is projected to cost \$1.6 billion, over three times the amount allocated in tonight's Budget. The Government will therefore need to build on tonight's ehealth initiative in the future in order to build a national health technology infrastructure to underpin the implementation of the COAG reforms. These include the development and implementation of national performance standards and activity-based funding.

"AHHA also supports the increased funding for primary care, including the additional GP superclinics and support for GPs to employ practice nurses. The practice nurse program has been successful in increasing the capacity of rural general practice for a number of years and its expansion into urban areas is a positive move.

"In particular, we welcome the Government's response to AHHA's call for additional funding for sub-acute care. This critical area of health care has been previously neglected, resulting in increased pressure on hospitals and an inefficient use of health resources.

"The biggest loser in tonight's Budget is mental health which continues to be short changed in the current health reform process. AHHA calls on the Government to recognise and address the unmet need for mental health services in the community and in institutional settings.

"To ensure these Budget initiatives and the COAG reforms can be successfully implemented independent of political influence, AHHA proposes the establishment of a new statutory National Health Commission with Commonwealth, State, clinical and community representation and a small independent staff. This would provide the expertise necessary for the implementation of the reforms and ensure that the new Budget measures and the COAG reforms result in maximum health gains to the community," Ms Power said.

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