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**HEALTH BUDGET 2010-11:
 AMA WELCOMES SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENT IN HEALTH AND
 CALLS FOR CAREFUL IMPLEMENTATION**

The AMA tonight welcomed the Federal Budget investment of more than \$7 billion to bolster the health system and provide Australians with better access to quality health services.

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said the AMA has been calling for major Government investment in health and tonight’s Budget has delivered substantial new funding and reforms within a tight fiscal environment.

“In good economic times and bad, governments must invest in the health of the population – and this Budget delivers strongly for health,” Dr Pesce said.

“The Budget confirms the promised funding for the COAG health agreement and spells out new spending in key areas of the Government’s health reform agenda, including primary care and e-Health.

“This investment package will require careful implementation, particularly in the areas of diabetes care and chronic disease management, so that what currently works well is not weakened in an attempt to shift resources for patients away from medical practices and their family doctor.

“For the new primary health care organisations, or Medicare Locals, to be fully effective in meeting patient and community needs, they must complement and support the work of GPs, not replace them.

“As the Government has promised, GPs will remain responsible for the overall management of a patient’s care.

“Medicare Locals must provide GPs with more options to help their patients access allied health services - particularly in areas of unmet need.

“Medicare Locals must be about improving patients’ access to allied health care, and not adding new layers of bureaucracy and red tape.”

Dr Pesce said the AMA supports the extra funding that will allow more general practices to employ a practice nurse and the removal of geographic boundaries on practice nurse subsidy arrangements, although the AMA supports the continuation of special loadings for rural areas as part of the implementation process.

“Practice nurses working as part of a general practice team have been a success story with more than 8,500 practice nurses working across the country,” Dr Pesce said.

“The new arrangements proposed by the Government will support practice nurses to undertake a wider range of work on behalf of GPs than they are currently funded to do.”

Dr Pesce said the Government's announcement of \$355 million to support GP infrastructure falls short of the AMA recommendation on GP infrastructure, yet has the potential to assist some GP practices.

"In relation to the expansion of the Government's GP Super Clinics program, the AMA advises close consultation with the medical profession prior to deciding the location of these clinics to ensure they complement existing GP services, not compete with them.

"In this regard, the Government needs to be mindful of the difficulties experienced in the rollout of the first tranche of Super Clinics."

Dr Pesce said the AMA recognises the desirability of an expansion of access to after hours GP services and is committed to work with the Government in the implementation of this policy to ensure that practices that currently have after hours arrangements in place are not penalised or disadvantaged.

"Funding for this program must be directed at the provision of care for patients and not consumed by Medicare Locals bureaucracy or the proposed call centre arrangements.

"We urge close consultation with the AMA and the profession to maximise the benefits of this program for patients."

In regard to the proposal to fund nurse practitioners in residential aged care facilities, Dr Pesce said residents in nursing homes must have access to the safety net of a medical diagnosis.

"The AMA has been an advocate for team-based care for patients.

"For this measure to work, the Government must ensure that nurse practitioners in nursing homes work in legislated collaborative care arrangements with the resident's usual GP.

"However, access to nurse practitioners in collaborative arrangements is not enough.

"It is vital that the Government provides sufficient funding so that doctors are available to provide medical services to nursing home residents."

The AMA welcomes the additional \$152 million provided to help keep veterans with complex and chronic disease out of hospital. This will include \$107 million in additional funding to support the provision of GP-coordinated care for veterans who are at risk of hospitalisation.

Dr Pesce said that, in the long term, it looks like a model that could be rolled out to improve the delivery of care for older people and those with chronic disease throughout the community.

The AMA supports the Government's investment in e-Health. Dr Pesce said it is important that the introduction of e-Health programs be accelerated.

"As part of enrolling people in the e-Health system, the Government will need to support medical practices with their information technology capability so that they can participate fully in the new e-Health environment."

Dr Pesce said a glaring and disappointing omission from the Health budget is any substantial measure to address the plight of people with mental illness.

Other Budget items:

- **Locum nurses in rural Australia**

While the AMA acknowledges the importance of nurses in rural Australia, we continue to call for the implementation of the Rural Rescue Package to establish rural medicine as a viable and attractive career option for our young doctors. People in rural Australia are as entitled to access to a medical practitioner as other Australians.

- **Tobacco taxes**

Smoking is one of Australia's biggest killers. The AMA congratulates the Government on its sensible move to increase tobacco taxes. The AMA has consistently called for the price of tobacco products to be raised to put tobacco further out of the reach of children, and to encourage adults to give up smoking.

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