

DOCTORS REFORM SOCIETY

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More money and resources for front line care in federal budget- a step in the right direction

“The new funding for health in the federal budget is a step in the right direction,” said Dr Tim Woodruff, President, Doctors Reform Society. “Putting money into front line care, especially when it is directed towards the frail elderly and those with complex care needs, is a welcome change of direction in government policy. It begins to address a glaring gap in health provision badly needed by the most vulnerable in our society and, if policy reform continues to be expanded in this direction in the future, will take considerable pressure off our heavily strained public hospitals, making them more sustainable,” said Dr Woodruff.

“Measures in the budget include an expansion of nurses in GP clinics in urban areas - rather than just rural areas as previously, is very welcome and will be a significant boost to GPs struggling with the increasingly complex demands of treating chronic diseases,” said Dr Woodruff. However, the Government must ensure that taxpayer subsidy of nurses in primary care does not end up only boosting GP rapid turnstile medicine for the worried well. There must also be a benefit to those patients currently missing out on a lot of necessary care e.g the frail elderly and those with complicated care needs that are currently generally ignored by over taxed and under supported GPs”.

“Funding for the previously announced primary health care organisations now called Locals, is also welcome,” said Dr Woodruff. “Their tasks of co-ordinating care and improving after hours access while laudable, will be very challenging without structural changes to how general practice and the GP are funded, i.e. a change from episodic fee for service payment. Such changes have been almost ignored by the reform proposals to date, although new funding of diabetic care is a notable but small step in the right direction.”

“Funding for ehealth is necessary but the biggest challenge is in its implementation,” said Dr Woodruff. “It is worth noting however that neither ehealth nor increased nurses in GP clinics will necessarily do anything to address the barriers to access suffered by our patients in areas of GP shortage or in areas where GPs require copayments which patients cannot afford”

“Finally, after all the politics of hospital funding, we can see some very welcome increased support for primary care”, said Dr Woodruff. “Whilst helpful, it is not major reform, and will have little effect on the unfairness of our health system, which will remain plagued by patients unable to find or afford a doctor in many poorer and/or country areas. In addition dental care continues to be ignored.”

“The overall changes proposed for our health system will definitely benefit some patients but there is so much more to do to move to a fair, efficient, and co-ordinated health system”

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