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MEDIA RELEASE

11 May 2010

BUILDING A HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK FOR AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

The Rudd Government will put in place the most significant reforms to Australia's health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare – to create a National Health and Hospitals Network that is funded nationally and run locally.

This Budget delivers an additional \$2.2 billion over four years – for better access to more doctors, especially GPs, an unprecedented level of support and training for our nurses and the introduction of personally controlled electronic health records for every Australian.

The Budget is the culmination of the Rudd Government's first term health reform agenda, with a focus on better hospitals and improved primary care and preventive health.

In total, this will see the Rudd Government provide a package of \$7.3 billion over five years in additional investment to deliver more doctors, more nurses, more hospital beds, and shorter waiting times for all Australians.

The Australian Government will deliver a total of \$7.3 billion in additional funding over the next five years to provide:

- expanded GP and primary care services, especially after hours;
- more support for nurses, particularly aged care nurses;
- quicker emergency department and elective surgery treatment times;
- personally controlled electronic health records;
- more training places for GPs and specialists;
- locum relief for rural nurses and allied health professionals;
- 1,300 new sub-acute hospital beds and 2,500 additional aged care beds;
- new investments in prevention, including tough new action to tackle smoking; and
- new investments in mental health services, with 20,000 extra young people to get assistance.

These changes are underpinned by a secure future funding base for health and hospitals – with the Commonwealth Government taking dominant funding responsibility for hospitals for the first time.

The Commonwealth will also take full funding and policy responsibility for GP and primary care and aged care services.

Better Access to After Hours Care, supported by *Medicare Locals*

The Rudd Government will establish a \$416.8 million nationwide network of *Medicare Locals*, including to deliver national after hours care twenty four hours a day and seven days a week.

A National After Hours Access Service will mean anyone needing to see a GP outside normal business hours will:

- call their usual general practice, and if the practice is not open, the call will be directed to the National Health Call Centre Network;
- then speak to a nurse or GP about their illness; and
- if required, be referred to a local after hours GP service, with the appointment coordinated by Medicare Locals.

This will help people who are unwell get the treatment they need when they need it, and help take pressure off our over-stretched emergency departments.

Medicare Locals will work to improve and expand much needed after hours services, as well as better connect hospital, GP, allied health, aged care, mental health and Indigenous health services in local communities.

Medicare Locals will be there to help people access the care they need, acting as a patient guide to help navigate through the many avenues of health care.

Expanding and upgrading primary care to build more GP Super Clinics

A \$355.2 million investment in more GP Super Clinics and expanded GP clinics will build better frontline health infrastructure.

This investment will deliver improved and expanded facilities in around 425 existing GP clinics and around 23 new GP Super Clinics.

Providing patients with more services in a single location in GP Super Clinics means patients are more easily able to get the full range of care they need.

It will mean less running around from one health professional to the next, and will provide patients with easier access to allied health care - such as physiotherapists, nutritionists and podiatrists – so that they can receive the services they need to stay healthy and out of hospital.

Helping health professionals work together in GP Super Clinics can also deliver a greater focus on prevention and the management of disease – and more room to train the next generation of doctors and nurses.

Investing in Australia's nurses and doctors

Strong support for our health professionals is central to building better health and hospitals.

This Budget provides a \$1.2 billion investment in the health workforce, including:

- \$493.4 million for more support for nurses, with aged care nurses to receive \$103.1 million extra;
- \$40.6 million to support nurses and allied health professionals working in rural areas; and
- more than \$640 million to deliver increased GP training places and more opportunities for young doctors to train as specialists.

Nurses are the backbone of our health system and this Budget recognises the importance of their skills and the need to keep them in the workforce.

The \$103.1 million extra will be provided to recognise and support our essential aged care nurses. This funding will help more people train to join the sector, and those that are there to upgrade their qualifications and stay in the industry.

Better Supporting Nurses in General Practices

The Rudd Government will invest \$390.3 million to support around 5,000 full time practice nurses in GP clinics.

Practice nurses can relieve the pressure on GPs by providing immunisations and wound care, and ensuring patients are reminded about appointments and are educated on how to manage or prevent illnesses.

The Rudd Government is also investing \$447.9 million for better coordinated care for patients with diabetes.

Personally controlled electronic health records

The Rudd Government will invest \$466.7 million to establish personally controlled electronic health records – a landmark investment that will mean that as Australians go from one health service provider to another, their health information is not left behind.

For the first time, Australians will be able to check their medical history online – including information such as medications and whether their immunisations are up to date – as secure personally controlled electronic health records are progressively introduced from 2012.

Better hospital and sub-acute services

From 1 July 2010, the Rudd Government will invest more than \$3 billion over four years to tackle key pressure points in our public hospitals, so patients will get quicker access to hospital services and better quality care.

This will include:

- \$753.2 million to cap emergency department waiting times at 4 hours and expand our emergency departments; and
- \$803.0 million for additional elective surgery procedures and expanding capacity – with a guarantee that 95 per cent of surgery will be delivered on time from 1 July 2012.

A total of \$1.63 billion for an estimated 1,316 new sub-acute beds by 2013-14 will support rehabilitation, palliative care, and mental health services – and help people get the right care for their needs.

Aged care

The Rudd Government will deliver a \$532.9 million package to build a nationally consistent, Commonwealth-run aged care system.

This will provide more beds, extra packages of care, more GP and primary care services in aged care facilities, make it simpler for older Australians to get into the system, and invest in stronger consumer protection.

Mental health

This Budget begins the task of reforming the mental health system, with a \$180 million investment focusing on young Australians – the age group most in need of additional assistance.

Prevention

The Government is taking tough action on smoking and binge drinking by:

- increasing tobacco excise by 25 per cent;
- reducing the attraction of cigarettes through plain packaging;
- investing in campaigns to encourage people to quit smoking; and
- providing an additional \$50.0 million for the National Binge Drinking Strategy.

Indigenous health

The Rudd Government is investing \$38.5 million to continue the rollout of Opal fuel, expanding storage and distribution of Opal fuel to 39 new retail sites.

Reforms to pharmacy, pharmaceuticals and medical expenses for a fiscally sustainable health system

The Rudd Government has negotiated the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement and further reforms to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) to deliver huge savings to the taxpayer – \$2.5 billion over five years. This ensures PBS medicines remain accessible for all Australians, and that pharmacy services and access to pharmacists remains sustainable into the future.

The Government will also increase the threshold above which a taxpayer can claim the net medical expenses tax offset to \$2,000 and will index this rate to CPI. This will come into effect from 1 July 2010, and result in savings of \$350 million over four years. The threshold has not been increased or indexed since 2002.

Record funding for health

The reforms and investment in this health Budget are fundamental to ensuring all Australians can enjoy better health and better hospitals thanks to improved access to high quality, sustainable health care as close to home as possible.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220

