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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE DOCTORS AND MORE NURSES IN NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK

The Government will invest \$1.2 billion in training and supporting more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, as part of building a National Health and Hospitals Network.

This includes an additional \$523 million investment in Australia's nurses.

In total, the Government's investments will:

- train almost 5,500 GPs and 680 specialist doctors;
- expand and improve support for more than 4,600 full-time equivalent nurses working in general practice, as well as other nurses working in training in aged care and rural areas; and
- support 800 allied health professionals working and training in rural areas over the next four years.

These investments will ensure our health workforce meets the needs of Australians today, and the growing demand for health services into the future.

More support for nurses in general practice

The Government will invest \$390.3 million to support almost the equivalent of 4,600 full-time practice nurses in general practice, in a major boost to primary care.

For the first time, GPs in urban areas will be eligible for funding to help employ practice nurses.

More practice nurses will help take pressure off GPs by providing clinical support in areas such as wound care and immunisation; managing recall and reminders systems; and patient education in areas such as weight loss and reducing alcohol consumption and quitting smoking.

The Australian General Practice Network has found that practices employing a practice nurse see more than 800 extra patients each year. With GPs then able to see an extra 3.8 million patients each year across Australia, patients will find it easier to get an appointment.

Annual incentive payments of \$25,000 per full time GP for a registered nurse and \$12,500 per full time GP for an enrolled nurse will be made available to eligible accredited general practices.

By 2013-14, an estimated 4,537 GP practices will receive more funding – worth \$31,500 per year on average – to make better use of highly skilled practice nurses.

Valuing our aged care nurses

The Government will invest \$103.1 million to better support nurses working in aged care settings.

To better support the current aged care nursing workforce, the Government will provide:

- \$59.9 million to provide incentive payments to existing aged care workers who upgrade their qualifications, and remain working in the aged care sector;
- \$21.0 million to fund an additional 600 enrolled nurse training places and 300 registered nurse scholarships over four years – for aged care nurses to upgrade their skills in recognition of the increasing frailty of older Australians in aged care;
- \$18.7 million to trial new models of care to expand and improve the role of nurse practitioners in aged care. Building on the 2009 Budget's changes to provide access to Medicare and PBS for nurse practitioners, this investment will support greater access to primary health care services for aged care residents; and
- \$3.5 million to explore regulation of personal care workers and assistants in nursing in aged care. This will assist in considering the inclusion of personal care workers in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

To better plan for aged care workforce needs into the future, the Government will also:

- provide \$500,000 to conduct a research study on staffing levels, skills mix and resident care needs in Australian residential aged care facilities; and
- as part of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into aged care, examine future workforce requirements, including the influences on supply and demand, and come up with options to ensure the sector continues to have a suitably qualified workforce to provide the best possible care.

Together, these measures will assist in building the aged care workforce needed to continue to provide high quality care to our ageing population.

Support for nurses and allied health professionals to train and work in rural areas

The Government will provide \$34.1 million for two new rural locum programs to give around 3,000 nurses and 400 allied health professionals time to take leave, achieve appropriate work-life balance and attend continuing professional development over the next four years.

The Government will also invest \$6.5 million in providing 400 additional clinical training scholarships over four years for allied health students in rural and regional areas – to provide more opportunities for allied health students interested in working in the bush.

Mental health nurses

The Government is committed to supporting and expanding the number of specialist mental health nurses.

As part of the Government's mental health package, \$13.0 million over two years will be provided to employ 136 mental health nurses and provide an estimated 11,700 sessions to people with mental illness.

Providing Career Support and Choices for Nurses

The Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Program has returned 756 nurses to the workforce. This program will cease in 2010, with allocated funding being redirected towards the \$523 million in new nursing initiatives included in this Budget.

Training more doctors

As previously announced, the Government will fund more training opportunities for young doctors by investing \$640 million to deliver an additional 5,500 training GPs, 680 medical specialists, and 5,400 pre-vocational general practice program (PGPPP) training places over the coming decade.

The Government is providing funding to:

- double the number of places available for medical graduates to train to become a GP to 1,200 a year by 2014;
- more than double the current number of places available for medical graduates to undertake training to become specialist doctors in private, community and rural settings from 360 to 900 by 2014;
- double the number of places available for junior doctors to experience a career in general practice before they become a fully fledged doctor to 975 places a year by 2014.

More allied health professionals

For the first time, the Government will invest \$5.3 million to support up to 1,000 allied health workers take leave and attend training courses to improve and update their skills.

The Government is also providing \$6.5 million for 1,000 extra clinical training scholarships for allied health students to help train our future physiotherapists, podiatrists and dieticians.

This additional investment in Australia's health workforce is in addition to the commitment to fund 60 per cent of training in public hospitals as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network.

These changes will mean that the Government is training and supporting more doctors, more nurses and more allied health care professionals than ever before.

Australians will be more likely to remain fit and well for longer because they can get the care they need, from a significantly expanded workforce of health professionals.

These investments are essential to ensuring our health system is able to cope with demands and pressures of our growing and ageing population.

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