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INVESTMENT IN HEALTH CRUCIAL – AMA
Federal Budget 2021-22

As Australia finds its way out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lessons learned about our health systems must not be lost. The Australian Government must use next week’s Federal Budget to commit to measures that ensure our health systems are resilient and effective now and beyond COVID-19.

“We know areas of our health system are failing Australians, and we cannot continue the business as usual approach to funding,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

“There continues to be unmet need for health services in the community, and the ongoing need for further investment in our health care system to ensure services are accessible and affordable for patients is only going to increase.”

The AMA has identified key areas that need immediate funding commitments in the upcoming Budget – permanent telehealth; public hospitals; aged care; general practice; private health insurance; and Indigenous health.

“The pandemic revealed how vital and effective telehealth could be, yet the Australian Government has not committed to extend this beyond the end of this year,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The AMA has been advocating for permanent Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebates for patient telehealth consultations with general practitioners and medical specialists for years.

“While the most recent extension to the end of this year is welcome, we need a long term plan for telehealth now.

“Australians need to know that beyond the end of December they will continue to be able to use these services, which have made services much more accessible for patients.

“The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how crucial our front line health workers and health services are, and how vital it is for them to be properly resourced and supported.

“We need more support for our public hospitals that continue to face overwhelming demand.

“Every year, the AMA produces a Public Hospital Report Card, and every year, without fail, we see hospital performance go backwards.

“We need a comprehensive funding solution to our public hospital crisis – one that focusses on keeping people well and out of hospital where possible, waiting less when they need care, and a system able to cope when demand increases.

“General practice also needs extra investment to respond to the challenges of an ageing population and the growing burden of multiple health conditions.

“The MBS Review highlighted the importance of better supporting the provision of wound care in general practice, with patients often unable to access the best dressings for their clinical needs due to the lack of any funding for this critical service.

“At the moment, GPs are expected to carry the cost of providing dressings and bandages for patients who need wound care.

“Best practice wound care improves outcomes for patients and saves the health system money. The Government needs to get on and enact the recommendations put forward by the MBS Review including funding for a national wound consumables scheme.”

The Government must also deliver on its 2019-20 Budget commitment to spend an extra \$448.5 million to support general practice - funding that was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety revealed the considerable need for reform. The AMA’s report [Putting health care back into aged care](#) shows that making health care intrinsic to aged care will reduce reliance on the hospital system.

“We need a significant increase in funding for our aged care system to address the systemic failures uncovered by the Aged Care Royal Commission,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Reforms to aged care must include better funding to encourage more GP services to aged care and mandate that registered nurses be available to nursing home residents, around the clock.”

Private health insurance is also on the AMA’s list of Budget matters. Australia needs comprehensive reforms that address the decline in private health insurance and put it on a sustainable footing for the future.

“A healthy private sector is essential to our mixed public/private model of health care delivery,” Dr Khorshid said.

The ongoing travesty of poor health outcomes for disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous Australians, must be improved.

“Better access to care for disadvantaged communities, including rural Australia and Indigenous Australians is crucial if we are to live a fair and inclusive society.

“There is much to be done, and I urge the Government to put health at the front of its Budget priorities,” Dr Khorshid said.

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