



Media Release
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Budget cuts “disastrous for hospitals and patients”

The state budget will be disastrous for hospitals, patients and staff, the Tasmanian President of the Australian Medical Association, A/Professor Tim Greenaway, said today.

“The yawning gap between funding and costs will be around 7% next year and 30% over the next four years. The budget figures show a slight rise in dollar terms but a massive and crippling cut in real terms,” Professor Greenaway said.

“The only way for hospitals to bridge that funding gap is to cut staff and patient numbers. Doctors and nurses just can’t work any harder than they do now. They’re already pushed to the limit. The problem with Tasmanian public hospitals is capacity not inefficiency.

“Year after year of budget cuts by successive state governments have already made our public hospitals concentrate on the most acutely ill patients, who cannot be ignored, at the expense of others.

“Others – people with chronic disease, those needing elective surgery or treatment by a specialist physician – are increasingly being ignored. Even now, some may never get the treatment they need.

“This disastrous budget will complete that process. Tasmania’s public hospitals will no longer be in any condition to give the people of this state the medical and surgical care they deserve as the citizens of a rich and developed country.

“The current crisis in the Launceston General Hospital emergency department is becoming the norm for Tasmanian hospitals. This past Thursday morning, 26 patients in the LGH’s emergency department needed hospital beds which weren’t available. Nine patients had been waiting for more than 24 hours.

“We know that patients who stay in ED for prolonged periods have poorer outcomes. The Royal Hobart Hospital is chronically bed blocked due to insufficient hospital beds for patients requiring admission.

“Next year, the Government will cut funding for emergency patients by 5.7%. Demand on Tasmanian public hospitals is steadily increasing. The situation is critical now but will get worse next year.

“The response of the Health Minister, Michael Ferguson, to the situation at the LGH has been unacceptable. He has accused nursing staff of being in league with the ACTU. He has tried to confuse people over the budget figures. He has sought to mislead the public into thinking this and the other rolling crises in our hospitals can be solved by simple administrative action.

“The Minister has said that the situation at the LGH is an operational matter and not a crisis. The AMA disagrees. Current staff shortages in the LGH’s emergency department are extraordinary.

“Instead of attacking the ANMF, we ask the Minister and the Government to find additional financial



resources desperately needed by the public hospital system, no matter how difficult this might be. The Government must realise that treating patient costs money. If the money isn't there, the patients can't be treated.

"The Government has the resources to do much better. And the Commonwealth needs to shoulder its share of the burden. It certainly isn't doing so right now. Tasmania deserves better."

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