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BIG WINNERS & LOSERS IN HEALTH BUDGET

Mental health, regional health, dental health and immunisation services are among the big winners in this year's health budget, while funding for aged care, pathology and hearing services has been slashed, according to the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

"It really is a mixed bag this year with both big winners and losers. The Government has delivered on key commitments in mental health and improved infrastructure in regional areas, while on the other hand areas such as community aged care and hearings services will see big cuts to existing program budgets," said Michael Moore, PHAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

"The Mental Health Reform Package, worth \$2.2 billion over 5 years, is a comprehensive suite of new and improved program measures in the critical areas of prevention, treatment and targeted interventions for at-risk groups. Funding is also provided for the establishment of a National Mental Health Commission to be located within the Prime Minister's portfolio and the PHAA congratulates the Government for implementing a whole-of-government approach.

"Equity in access and availability of health services for people in regional and rural areas will be enhanced by an investment of \$1.8 billion in infrastructure over 5 years, which will go towards improvements in health and hospital facilities and equipment.

"A National Advisory Council on Dental Health will be established to advise the Government on significant reforms to dental health. A further \$52.6 million over 5 years has been allocated for a dental internship year program to provide enhanced access to dental health professionals and address unmet need. An additional \$40.7 million over 4 years is also provided under the National Immunisation Program for a vaccine to protect children against pneumococcal disease.

"Also worth noting is the significant cross-portfolio investment for a package of education, employment and health initiatives designed to *Close the Gap* in Indigenous disadvantage – worth \$526.6 million over 5 years.

"However, funding for community aged care places will be slashed by \$211.7 million; pathology services funded under the Medicare Benefits Schedule will be cut by \$406 million; and funding for better targeted services under the existing Hearing Services Program will reduce by \$122.3 million over 5 years.

"Funding for a variety of population health and prevention programs and initiatives has remained on track, building on the Government's response to the National Preventative Health Taskforce report. Support for health and medical research has also remained constant.

"While there are some important initiatives in key areas in this year's health budget, there are also some significant concerns arising in areas where so-called efficiencies have been achieved," concluded Mr Moore.

For further information/comment:

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