

PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA BUDGET 2009-10 SUMMARY BRIEF

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Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

13 May 2009

FEDERAL HEALTH BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Indigenous Health

\$204.3M to improve health care in Indigenous communities and help close the life expectancy gap, including:

- \$131.1M for remote primary care;
- \$58.3M for eye and ear health care;
- \$11M for dental care; and
- \$3.8M for pathology services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Maternity Services

\$120.5M package of measures to improve choice and access to maternity services, including:

- Medicare Benefits Schedule and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme benefits for services provided by eligible midwives;
- Govt-supported professional indemnity insurance scheme for eligible midwives;
- Expansion of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program for rural and remote communities;
- Extra scholarships for GPs and midwives (focus on rural and remote areas); and
- New 24 hour hotline for families to provide maternity info before and after birth.

Paid Parental Leave

- 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the federal minimum wage from January 2011 for those earning less than \$150,000 a year.

Public Hospital Funding

- \$60B for public hospital services (over 5 years);
- \$750M to reduce pressure on emergency departments;
- \$500M for sub-acute care services; and
- \$1.1B (over 4 years) to train more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals.

Hospital Infrastructure

- \$1.5B to upgrade hospital infrastructure.

Prevention

Delivering on COAG health promotion commitment to combat problems caused by tobacco, obesity and excessive consumption of alcohol, including:

- \$872.1M (over 6 years) to prevent lifestyle risks that cause chronic disease; and
- Establishment of a National Preventive Health Agency.

Rural and Remote Workforce

- \$134.4M to address rural and remote workforce shortages.

Cancer Care System

- \$2B to build a cancer care system – promoting research and improving outcomes for patients in rural and regional Australia.

Health and Medical Research Infrastructure

- \$430.3M to build and upgrade health and medical research and training facilities.

Further detail on the 2009-10 Health Budget can be found at:

http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/publishing.nsf/Content/2009-2010_Health_PBS

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Overall PHAA Response

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has welcomed the Australian Government's focus on Indigenous health and maternity support in the budget. PHAA is supportive of measures designed to enhance access to health care for Indigenous Australians in remote areas and a range of broader preventive initiatives in Indigenous health.

The Government has allocated \$131.1 million for remote primary health measures, \$58.3 million for eye and ear health care, \$11 million for dental care and \$3.8 million to improve pathology services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The strong preventive focus of the range of Indigenous health initiatives funded in each of these key areas is particularly positive.

PHAA is also encouraged by the provision of \$120.5 million in measures to improve the range of options and access to maternity services for pregnant women and new mothers. Access to the Medicare Benefits Schedule and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for eligible midwives are among measures to increase birthing choices for women and enhance access to services across rural and regional areas. The creation of a new 24 hour pregnancy and maternity support hotline for families will also be of great benefit. The focus on Indigenous health and maternity services in this year's budget will provide a foundation for the improvement of health outcomes in future years.

PHAA strongly supports the Government's move to introduce paid parental leave from January 2011 for those earning less than \$150,000 a year. The delivery of 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the federal minimum wage is a strong step in the right direction in terms of ensuring better health outcomes for both babies and mothers and establishing more family friendly working environments. PHAA has long been advocating the potential health benefits associated with the provision of paid parental leave and looks forward to the commencement of the new scheme in 2011.

While recognising that this has been a tough budget, PHAA has noted and welcomed some important initiatives. PHAA will follow up both the positive initiatives and the areas in which concerns have been expressed.

FEDERAL HEALTH BUDGET CONCERNS

Alcohol and Tobacco Taxation

There has been no increase in alcohol and tobacco taxes.

Australian Better Health Initiative (ABHI)

- \$122.3M cut from different aspects of the ABHI, including promoting healthy lifestyles.

e-Health Programs

- \$34.8M cut from e-Health programs.

National Illicit Drug Strategy (NIDS)

- \$24.7M cut from NIDS.

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Public Health Education and Research Program (PHERP)

- 29.5M gone – program discontinued.

Grants for Physical Activity Projects in the Community

- \$3.3M gone – program discontinued.

BUDGET '09: WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

Consumers Health Forum of Australia

The 2009-10 Health Budget will provide better access to health care, particularly for rural and remote communities, Indigenous Australians and those seeking maternity services, the Executive Director of the Consumers Health Forum of Australia, Carol Bennett, said.

Australian Nursing Federation

Nurses say they're delighted they can now access federal government subsidies which means faster access to health care for the public. ANF president Ged Kearney says the changes are quite possibly the most significant health reform initiatives in this country since the introduction of Medicare.

The Australian College of Midwives says it was a historic night for child-bearing women and their families.

Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association

The Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association (AHHA) has welcomed the Federal Government's announcement of much-needed health infrastructure projects.

Australian Medical Association

The president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) says the Government has not delivered on its promises in the health sector. Dr Capolingua says she has issues with the means-testing of the private health cover rebate.

She welcomed the deal to allow midwives and doctors to work as a team, but cautioned that allowing nurses access to the Pharmaceuticals Benefit Scheme (PBS) could increase costs.

YWCA Australia

The YWCA Australia congratulated the Government on the paid parental leave scheme outlined in the Budget papers.

"Tonight, the Rudd Government has delivered on its commitment to paid parental leave," YWCA Australia Policy Coordinator, Ms Raina Hunter said.

Australian Council of Social Service

Following the Budget, community sector organisations are increasingly concerned that gaps between income support payments are widening and there is now a four-class system of income support.

There is a \$147 per week gap between the top and bottom income support payments. New research released by ACOSS shows a stark contrast in the different levels of income support payments and an increasingly complex system.

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http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/publishing.nsf/Content/2009-2010_Health_PBS