



PRIME MINISTER

THE COALITION'S *PLAN FOR BETTER PUBLIC HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CARE*

Today I am pleased to announce the Coalition's plan to take the pressure off public hospitals and to provide better health care for all Australians.

Australia has an excellent health system by international standards. Together, public and private hospitals, primary and preventative health care services, Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and aged care services are working hard to meet the health care needs of all Australians.

However, all Australians know that the public hospital system is under pressure.

Our plan includes the restoration of local hospital boards to make decisions about local hospitals; more Australian-trained doctors, nurses and specialists; more alternatives to help take the pressure off public hospitals and more public hospital beds.

Local hospital management and more accountability

A re-elected Coalition Government will give local communities control of their local hospitals by requiring that the States and Territories restore local hospital boards for every public hospital with more than 50 beds.

We will also expect the States and Territories to comply with the wishes of those communities with smaller hospitals who also want to establish a local hospital board.

As most States and Territories have abolished local hospital boards, decisions about local hospitals are instead being made by bureaucrats too far removed from the local community to understand local needs.

The restoration of local hospital boards will ensure that the views and needs of the local community are represented and taken into account in the day-to-day running of the hospital.

We will also make the States and Territories more accountable for the taxpayer funding they receive to run and manage public hospitals. As part of the Australian Health Care Agreements State and Territory governments will be required to make available detailed information about individual hospital performance, including on staffing levels and elective surgery and emergency department waiting times.

More Australian-trained doctors, nurses and specialists

A re-elected Coalition Government will help to relieve pressure on public hospitals by funding more Australian-trained doctors, nurses and specialists.

We have previously announced our plan for a 50 per cent increase in GP training places and 80 per cent more places for junior doctors to gain experience in general practice. Our plan also includes doubling the number of medical specialist training places in private hospitals and surgeries, while ensuring that the States and Territories increase the number of training places for medical students and specialist trainees in public hospitals.

The Coalition will enable 500 additional students each year to undertake hospital-based enrolled nurse training by establishing 25 Australian Hospital Nursing Schools.

More alternatives to public hospitals and emergency departments

The Coalition will help relieve pressure on public hospitals and their emergency departments by providing real alternatives for patients who need care.

As previously announced, we will provide Australians with more family-friendly emergency care through 50 Family Emergency Medical Centres, to be run by GPs and their practice nurses. These centres will be able to provide emergency care – such as wound stitching, fracture setting and dealing with sprains and minor burns – including after hours.

We will also help to prevent older Australians from needing hospital care by treating their illnesses and injuries at home. As previously announced, a re-elected Coalition Government will fund 800,000 home visits by practice nurses to older Australians and veterans over the next four years.

When older Australians need hospital care, the Coalition believes that they should be able to receive it.

However, we also recognise that some older Australians may stay longer than medically necessary in public hospitals after acute care treatment because they need support to return to living in the community.

By helping people out of hospital beds when they no longer need them we can free up more public hospital beds for people with acute care needs.

A re-elected Coalition Government will provide, by 2011, at least 13,000 more older Australians each year with support to return to living in the community after a stay in hospital through the Transition Care program. The Coalition introduced the Transition Care program with 2,000 places in the 2004-2005 Budget and if re-elected we will provide \$117 million over four years to double the number of places in the program to 4,000.

A re-elected Coalition Government will also provide at-home care for an extra 4,200 older Australians over the next four years by funding an additional 1,000 aged care places in the community. These places will include 200 high-care, 200 dementia-specific high-care and 600 low-care places and will cost \$86 million over four years.

A re-elected Coalition Government will provide extra capital funding to make residential high care places available more quickly. We will double funding by providing an extra \$46 million over four years to existing aged care capital programs to help residential aged care operators to respond faster to the increasing demand for high care aged care places.

These initiatives will ensure that there are more places available for older Australians who need to move out of hospital and into aged care, and will also help to prevent their hospitalisation in the first place.

More public hospital beds

The States and Territories have closed thousands of public hospital beds over the past decade, forcing too many Australians to wait weeks and months for necessary hospital treatment.

In order to address the shortfall in public hospital beds, a re-elected Coalition Government will negotiate with the States and Territories to open more public hospital beds and keep them open. This will help to take further pressure of public hospitals and reduce waiting lists.

To enable public hospitals to upgrade their facilities and ensure their patients can benefit from the latest medical technology, in August this year the Coalition established the Health and Medical Investment Fund.

This fund will be augmented from the proceeds of the sale of Medibank Private. In addition, depending on economic circumstances, a re-elected Coalition Government will make further contributions to that fund out of future surpluses, which will provide an ongoing revenue stream for hospitals. Earnings from the Investment Fund will be provided directly to hospital boards, not State and Territory governments.

Rural and regional communities

Importantly, the Coalition's *Plan for Public Hospitals* will help improve support for rural and regional communities, including by restoring local hospital boards to be responsible for local community health needs.

To encourage more GPs to work in rural and regional communities, the Coalition will ensure that half of the new GP training places under our plan are allocated to rural and regional areas.

The Coalition's budgeted funding for public hospitals will provide the States and Territories with funding for rural and regional hospital needs, and we will ensure that an appropriate proportion of the extra public hospital beds will be opened in rural and regional hospitals.

The needs of rural and regional hospitals will be given appropriate priority under the Health and Medical Investment Fund, and the Coalition is maintaining and improving the Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund, which helps build walk-in walk-out medical facilities in rural towns.

The Coalition's *Plan for Public Hospitals and Health Care* provides a comprehensive plan to address the financial and underlying structural challenges facing Australia's public hospitals, an investment only made possible by our disciplined economic management.

Together with our strong support for a balance between the public and private health systems, a re-elected Coalition Government will continue to implement our plan to protect and strengthen health care for all Australians.

15 November 2007