

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's health sector needs more than Budget band-aids and blame games

The federal government needs to start treating the cause, not the symptoms, of Australia's health sector problems.

AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim says it will be disappointing if tomorrow's budget contains only band-aids and blame games.

"Recent media reporting has seen Canberra denigrate specialists and regurgitate outworn slogans about bulk billing," he said.

"This simplistic story ignores the very real neglect of our public hospital system by chronic under-funding.

"The government took months to resolve its stalemate for a new National Health Reform Agreement and it still falls short of the 50/50 state-federal funding our public hospitals desperately need to reduce waiting lists.

"Australia has had a world-class public hospital system for decades and patients should be able to access timely treatment in their local hospital.

"Instead, many taxpayers are being forced to pay privately for essential surgeries or suffer worsening pain, poorer outcomes and lost wages from extended time off work.

"We need an urgent uplift in funding to ensure our public hospitals can deliver the care Australians deserve."

Dr Yim also said Medicare rebates had failed to keep up with rising costs of delivering quality healthcare.

"Specialists charge fair fees for their services but can only absorb so much without increased rebates.

"AMA Queensland's Medical Costs Guide shows rebates for common specialist appointments are just 35% of the real cost, and it's worse in regional and rural areas.

"Instead of recognising their role in helping patients by boosting those rebates, the government is choosing to blame doctors."

True reform of the private health sector was also critical.

"Australia needs an independent regulator to determine premium rises and stop declining value for patients," Dr Yim said.

"When people give up their cover because they still face big out-of-pocket costs, it puts them back into the public system, and the pressure intensifies."

Dr Yim said investment was needed in primary care systems that are proven to work.

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“The government has made a fanfare of its Urgent Care Clinics, but these are a political vote-spinner that ultimately cost taxpayers more.

“Canberra could double Medicare rebates for GPs and it would still be cheaper per patient than Urgent Care Clinics.”

GPs should also be centred in the implementation of any reforms to the NDIS to ensure the integrity of the scheme and protection for NDIS customers.

“This will be especially important if the government acts as it should to get NDIS and aged care patients out of public hospitals to reduce bed block,” Dr Yim said.

AMA Queensland is also reiterating calls for concrete actions to boost the health workforce.

“We need more Commonwealth Supported Places for medical students, especially to bolster the future workforce in our regional, rural and remote communities,” Dr Yim said.

“AMA Queensland’s Workforce Action Plan outlines reforms to the medical training pipeline to reduce stress for trainees and get doctors where patients need them.

“Now more than ever, we need the government to show true leadership and invest in the solutions that will bring more doctors into the health system, and give Australians the timely, affordable and quality care they expect and deserve.”