

Labor's Better Health Package Welcomed But Further Reforms Still Needed

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance today released a report card comparing the range of health care initiatives proposed by the major political parties during the campaign.

The Alliance wants reforms that provide improved models of care as well as the additional dollars to improve quality and fairness in our health care system.

The Labor party has addressed a number of the issues raised at the Alliance's health care summit held in 2003.

- We welcome Labor's attention to the urgent need for State/Federal cooperation (the Medicare partnership), recognition that the Australian Government does have a major responsibility to assist the States in the provision of hospital care (Medicare Gold) and the need for partnership between private and public sector health facilities.
- Labor will create as we have urged, a Health Reform Commission to further drive the reform agenda after the election.

Labor will also restore the one billion dollars lost to the public hospital system in the last Australian Health Care Agreement.

- The emphasis on revitalising specialist outpatient clinics in public hospitals is important and will address a current and major inequity - *personal finances should not determine one's ability to access specialist care.*
- Given the critical shortage of health care professionals Labor's additional university places for doctors and nurses are welcome and a far better response to the workforce shortages than those proposed by the coalition.
- The Alliance has long urged governments to address the oral health needs of Australians and Labor has responded.

The Alliance also welcomes the promised additional spending on health by the Coalition but we are very disappointed with Minister Abbott's declaration that our health care system does not need reform. Unfortunately, the injection of funding represents additional financial support for a seriously flawed system and misses a unique and historic opportunity for significant reform.

There is little difference in the dollars both major parties would use to support primary care or mental health.

- Neither has addressed the urgent need for more inpatient facilities for our mentally ill though Labor's support for mentally ill patients in emergency departments is important.
- Neither party has adequately addressed Indigenous health, the problems associated with health care delivery in rural Australia, the health care needs of the disabled nor the critical need to improve health promotion (disease prevention).

Media Release

The Alliance supports Labor's "Medicare Gold" initiative in principle but unreserved endorsement will depend on details that to make it clear the public hospital system, as well as the private hospital system, will be strengthened by the approach. This will include a commitment in the private hospital sector to expanded workforce training opportunities and quality outcomes.

In summary, based on key health related outcomes sought by the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance, the Labor health care package is recommended as the better option. Improving our health care system is clearly the major domestic agenda that Australians wish to see addressed during this election and the Labor's package is clearly superior.

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The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance consists of 25 health professional and consumer organisations with informed views on health policy

Australian College of Midwives
Australian Consumers' Association
Australian Council of Social Service
Australian Health Promotion Association
Australian Healthcare Association
Australian Nursing Federation
Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation
Catholic Health Australia
Centre for Clinical Governance (UNSW)
Children's Hospitals Association of Australasia
Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW
Doctors' Reform Society of Australia
Effective Health Care Network (University of Sydney)
Health Issues Centre
Health Professional Council of Australia
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
National Council on Intellectual Disability
National Public Hospitals Clinicians' Taskforce
National Rural Health Alliance
NSW Nurses' Association
Public Health Association of Australia
Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Rural Doctor's Association of Australia
South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association (SASMOA)
Women's Hospitals Association of Australasia