

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUDGET DELIVERS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE FUTURE

Patients are big winners from Federal Budget commitments to fund more practice nurses, put money into eHealth and invest in better access to after-hours care, according to General Practice Tasmania spokesperson, Dr Judith Watson.

“There are many aspects of this Budget that primary health care has been seeking for some time,” Dr Watson said.

“Until now, the government’s focus in health reform has been on hospital care. The real reform and investment needs to happen in general practice because that’s where patients will see tangible benefits to their health” she said.

The Budget has committed a significant investment to begin to reorient the health system away from hospitals and towards more general practice and other primary health care services. This includes an additional \$390 million over four years to increase the number of practice nurses, \$466 million over two years to improve eHealth and \$126 million to expand after-hours care.

The payments for after-hours services will run through primary health care organisations (PHCOs) that were announced by the Prime Minister, last month. These PHCOs will evolve from general practice networks and will start from next year.

“PHCOs will be funded to improve the delivery of and access to GP and primary health care services at the local level. Clearly there is further detail to come, but the role of a PHCO will be to identify specific services that the population of a local area needs, or where groups of people are missing out on GP and primary health care. PHCOs will also better target services to respond to these gaps. For example, targeting gaps in GP services for aged care recipients, or developing local after-hours roster systems, perhaps in conjunction with the local hospital, to allow patients to access care, but sharing the workload among practices.

“The practice nurse payment of \$25,000 per GP, rising to a maximum of \$32,500 in remote areas, is particularly relevant having been announced the day before International Nurses Day.

“This payment recognises the great value practice nurses bring to patients and to general practices. The additional funding will improve access to care for patients and alleviate the workforce pressures on our GPs. While this and other measures in the Budget to expand the primary care workforce are welcome, there will be recruitment challenges, at least in the short term,” Dr Watson said.

“We are also pleased to see other investments such as infrastructure funding for general practices and continued investment in mental health services delivered in primary health care as these are also essential elements to turning the system around,” Dr Watson said.

(ENDS)

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The General Practice Tasmania Network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. The General Practice Tasmania Network is a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

