



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

12 May 2009

Investing in the Health Workforce – Backing Our Doctors, Nurses and Midwives

The Rudd Government is delivering a vital boost to our hardworking doctors, nurses and midwives in the 2009-10 Budget with a series of major investments to expand and modernise our health workforce.

The Rudd Government is:

- delivering more training places for GPs;
- providing Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) access for nurse practitioners and midwives; and
- reforming support, scholarship and training programs.

The Budget initiatives build on the Government's unprecedented \$1.1 billion package of COAG reforms to expand Australia's health workforce. The COAG package increased funding for undergraduate clinical training and postgraduate training places, and established a national health workforce agency to drive a more strategic long-term plan for the health workforce.

Investing in doctors

The Budget workforce initiatives will:

- invest \$148 million over five years for an additional 75 GP training places in 2009 and 100 new places in 2010, and to provide 22 Remote Vocational Training Scheme GP training places from 2011. In addition, 212 GP training places are being provided through the COAG package from 2011. This will permanently increase the number of GP training places to more than 800 places per annum from 2011 onwards – a 35 per cent increase on the cap of 600 places imposed since 2004;
- encourage more junior doctors to become GPs by investing an additional \$41.2 million over four years in high quality, supervised, general practice training under the Prevocational General Practice Placement program; and
- establish the first medical school in the Northern Territory, with a strong focus on increasing the number of Indigenous doctors. The Government will invest \$27.8 million in capital funding to establish the medical school plus \$4.4 million over three years from July 2010 in ongoing funding.

Investing in nurses and midwives

The Government will recognise the valuable role and skills that nurses bring to the health system and to the broader community through:

- providing access to the MBS and PBS for nurse practitioners, at a cost of \$59.7 million over four years. This will improve the flexibility and capacity of Australia's health workforce, and improve patient access to services; and
- providing eligible midwives access to the MBS and PBS for the first time, expanding choice for women, at a cost of \$66.6 million over four years.

These measures will improve the flexibility of the health workforce, and facilitate better access to services for patients.

Investing in the pathology and diagnostic imaging workforce

There are currently significant workforce shortages affecting both pathology and diagnostic imaging. To help address this, the Government will fund:

- an increase in pathology training places from 30 to 50 places, at a cost of \$10.8 million over four years; and
- an additional 15 diagnostic imaging training positions, on top of an existing six places for radiologists, at a cost of \$5.7 million over four years.

The Government will also introduce a mentoring and academic support initiative for rural pathologists at a cost of \$6.2 million over four years.

Investing in the whole health workforce

The Government will also support the whole health workforce through:

- providing an extra \$7.6 million over three years to modernise the funding formula for Divisions of General Practice and support local communities, particularly those with growing populations, bringing total funding to the Divisions to more than \$220 million a year; and
- cutting red tape by streamlining scholarship and training programs, including for nurses and allied health professionals, medical specialists, and medical and health professionals in rural and remote Australia.

The Government's workforce initiatives will complement its package of rural health reforms that better target and modernise programs to encourage doctors to work in Australia's rural and remote communities.

For all inquiries please contact the Minister's office – 02 6277 7220