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Investing in Australia's health: Strengthening Cancer Care

New funding of \$189.4 million for the Strengthening Cancer Care initiative in the five years to 2008-09 will see the Australian Government deliver its election commitment to help reduce the burden of cancer.

This \$189.4 million commitment will provide funding to:

- develop and implement training courses for cancer nurses (\$4.1m);
- improve professional development for cancer professionals, counsellors and general practitioners (\$3.3m);
- develop and implement mentoring for regional cancer services (\$14.1m);
- improve support for those newly diagnosed with breast cancer (\$1.0m);
- increase cancer research (\$17.6m);
- enhance cancer screening and awareness (\$45.4m);
- support cancer clinical trials (\$21.7m);
- build cancer support groups (\$3.1m);
- provide MBS eligibility for a MRI unit at Sydney's Children's Hospital (\$5.1m);
- support children with cancer and their families (\$2.0m);
- enhance palliative care programs (\$23.1m);
- improve the early detection and management of breast cancer (\$4.0m);
- establish a new national cancer agency, *Cancer Australia* (\$13.7m);
- establish a national research centre for asbestos related diseases (\$5.5m);
- provide additional radiation therapy internships and undergraduate places (\$14.9m);
- redevelop the children's cancer ward at Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne (\$10.0m); and
- evaluate the initiative in 2007-08 (\$1.2m).

Better coordination

Developing and implementing mentoring for regional cancer services

Over the four years from 2005-06, the government is allocating \$14.1 million in new funding to assist hospitals, providers and support networks to develop and implement cancer care mentoring.

The national agency, Cancer Australia, will oversee this measure. Funding will be used to help link major urban teaching hospitals to regional and bush nursing hospitals in regional centres and help foster multi-disciplinary approaches in regional areas where on the ground support is less comprehensive.

The measure will encourage specialists and other leading health professionals from centres of excellence in cancer treatment to spend more time in rural and regional areas and be available to consult with regional colleagues.



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Improving the early detection and management of breast cancer

The National Breast Cancer Centre will receive a new funding allocation of \$4.0 million over five years from 2004-05 to help raise awareness about early detection of breast cancer, and to identify improved approaches to early detection and management - including cancer in men, younger women and Indigenous Australians.

Establishing a new national cancer agency, Cancer Australia

New funding of \$13.7 million over five years from 2004-05 is being provided to establish a national cancer agency, to be called *Cancer Australia*. This agency will provide national leadership in cancer control and make recommendations to the Minister for Health and Ageing about cancer policy and priorities.

Evaluation of the Strengthening Cancer Care Initiative

The Strengthening Cancer Care Initiative will be evaluated from 2007-08, with new funding of \$1.2 million being provided over two years to carry out the task. The evaluation will include initiatives that fall within the support for people living with cancer, support for cancer health professionals, and coordination and research categories.

Enhanced prevention

Bowel Cancer Screening

Ninety Australians each week die from bowel cancer. As part of its Strengthening Cancer Care Package, the Government has allocated \$43.4 million over three years for the phasing in of a national bowel cancer screening program. This funding includes \$7.8 million announced in the 2004-05 Budget for the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot program.

This program will reduce the number of people who die from bowel cancer which is the most common internal cancer affecting Australians and the second-highest cause of cancer-related deaths, behind lung cancer. Early diagnosis of bowel cancer or pre-cancerous abnormalities has been shown to increase the chances of survival. This national program will build on the success of the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot.

From the middle of 2006, people turning 55 years or 65 years old across Australia will be invited to complete a simple, yet highly effective test in the privacy of their own home and mail it in for analysis.

People in Mackay, Melbourne and Adelaide who took part in the Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot will be reinvited to do the screening test.

The results of these two new phases of screening will be evaluated and considered by the Government prior to the 2008 Budget. This evaluation will guide the Government's further



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consideration of the structure and shape of a future national bowel cancer screening program in Australia.

Skin cancer awareness

As part of the Strengthening Cancer Care initiative, the Australian Government has committed new funding of \$5.5 million over two years to 2006-07 to educate Australians about the importance of protecting themselves from skin cancer.

Smoking and pregnancy

The Australian Government is committed to reducing the number of women smoking during pregnancy, and the associated adverse health affects, by providing new funding of \$4.3 million over three years to 2007-08 to encourage doctors, midwives and Indigenous health workers to advise pregnant women about the damage caused by smoking.

Reaffirming a commitment to reduce mortality from cervical cancer

The Australian Government has reaffirmed its commitment to reducing mortality from cervical cancer by extending the existing Cervical Screening Incentives for General Practitioners initiative with continued funding of \$31.6 million in 2005-06. The Cervical Screening Incentive has been funded for only 12 months to enable the incentive to be further examined.

The initiative provides incentive payments to encourage GPs to adopt a systematic approach to regularly screen all women patients between the ages of 20 and 69 years, and in particular women at high risk, such as those in rural and remote areas, Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Support for those living with cancer

Local Palliative Care Grants program

Providing care for people who are dying and their families and carers is a hallmark of a humane and caring society. The Australian Government will provide \$23.1 million over the four years from 2005-06 for the Local Palliative Care Grants program, as part of its commitment to providing high quality palliative care for those who need it.

The funding will help local groups, church and charitable hospices and aged care providers to better provide support to cancer patients and their families.

This new funding will be used for:

- fit-out of and equipment for premises for palliative patients;
- pastoral care, counselling and support for people with cancer and their families;
- step-down and transition-to-home support; and



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- care plans for patients who are living at home, including support for health professionals to enable patients to stay at home.

Building cancer support groups

The Australian Government has committed new funding of \$3.1 million over five years from 2004-05 to assist in developing cancer support networks. Small grants of up to \$90,000 will be available as seed funding to support groups in the areas of bowel, lung, ovarian and other cancers. This funding will contribute to salary and administration expenses of the organisations.

Supporting children with cancer and their families

The Government has provided one-off grants of \$1.0 million in 2004-05 to both Camp Quality and the Make-A-Wish Foundation to help them to continue supporting children with cancer and their families.

Children's Cancer Centre Foundation

Children with cancer will benefit from further Australian Government funding to assist with the redevelopment of the children's cancer ward at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. The redevelopment will result in a world-class facility that will serve as a model for other institutions that treat children with cancer.

A total of \$10 million has been allocated for the redevelopment of the children's cancer ward at Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Of this, \$2 million will be provided as operating funding for the ward.

The redevelopment allows for facilities to be amalgamated in one area and for an additional 15 beds and improved parent facilities to be provided. The first stage of the redeveloped ward is due to open towards the end of 2005. The Australian Government's contribution will meet around half the cost of construction and fit-out of the ward.

MBS eligibility for a MRI unit at the Sydney Children's Hospital

As part of its ongoing strategy to improve cancer care, the Australian Government is extending Medicare eligibility to a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) unit to service the Sydney Children's Hospital.

This will enable children in NSW to have more convenient and affordable access to MRI services, which can be especially useful in the diagnosis and monitoring of cancers.

The Australian Government will provide new funding for this service from 1 July 2005. The Sydney Children's Hospital will provide Medicare-eligible MRI services with no out-of-pocket costs to patients. The cost of these services will be covered under Medicare.



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Improving support for those newly diagnosed with breast cancer

From 2005-06 the Australian Government will provide new funding of \$1.0 million over four years to Breast Cancer Network Australia to further develop and disseminate resources to help women newly diagnosed with breast cancer.

Continued access to the breast cancer treatment drug Herceptin

The Australian Government has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that Herceptin therapy continues to be available, free of charge, to people in the later stages of metastatic breast cancer.

Herceptin costs around \$66,000 per year per patient and, so far, more than 1,500 Australians have benefited from this drug.

Although applications to include Herceptin on the PBS have not been successful, to ensure people continue to benefit from this highly expensive drug, the government set up a separate program which began in December 2001 and has been extended for a further two years to 2006-07 at a cost of \$80.0 million.

Support for professionals

Developing and implementing training courses for cancer nurses

The Australian Government will provide \$4.1 million in new funding over the four years from 2005-06 to develop and implement a training package for nurses to become specialised in cancer care. This initiative will be managed by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, in association with other Australian cancer care institutions and professional colleges and associations.

The Peter MacCallum Institute is at the cutting edge in training staff in the use of advanced technology used in cancer diagnosis and treatments. The Institute has grown to become Australia's largest cancer centre and one of the few specialist oncology facilities in the world. It has gained international recognition for the quality of its treatment, patient care, research and educational services.

Improving professional development for cancer professionals, counsellors and general practitioners

The Government has committed new funding of \$3.3 million in 2005-06 to improve professional development for cancer professionals, counsellors and general practitioners.



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This initiative will focus on developing effective continuing professional education modules in the latest treatments for priority cancers such as breast, bowel and prostate cancers. It also includes providing advice and counselling to people with cancer and their families.

Radiation therapy internships and undergraduate places

The Government is providing new funding of \$14.9 million over five years from 2004-05 through the Strengthening Cancer Care initiative to train more health professionals in delivering radiation treatment for cancer.

Radiation therapists and radiation oncology medical physicists are vital to the delivery of safe, high-quality radiotherapy services for Australians with cancer. As part of this initiative, 100 additional radiation therapist training places will be provided over five years at a cost of \$6.0 million, starting in 2004-05, and running until 2008-09.

Over the same period, \$8.9 million will be provided to support these students and provide other training opportunities in radiation oncology. This funding will:

- encourage the radiation oncology sector to provide more internships for radiation therapy graduates undertaking a professional development year as part of their training;
- encourage the employment of more physics graduates as trainee medical physicists in radiation oncology; and
- provide more supervision and assistance to students needing to travel to undertake clinical placements while studying radiation therapy at university, and other support to radiation therapy students.

More research

Increasing cancer research and support for clinical trials

The Australian Government will invest \$39.2 million in new funding over the next four years to 2008-09 for a dedicated cancer research budget and infrastructure grants to build Australia's capacity for clinical trials.

The initial cancer research priorities will be:

- improving screening programs to ensure that patients can be identified and treated appropriately, and ensuring that screening services are effective;
- early detection of breast and ovarian cancers;
- the application of emerging new treatments and technologies, particularly for bowel and prostate cancer; and
- improvements in cancer outcomes through better coordination of care and a multi-disciplinary approach.

Cancer clinical trials are fundamental to establishing whether there is benefit in new treatments. The funds to support clinical trials will help contribute to reducing premature death and disability and improve the evidence behind cancer care.



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National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases

To improve the quality of life and wellbeing of Australians and their families affected by asbestos-related disease, the Australian Government will provide new funding of \$5.5 million over the four years from 2005-06 to establish a National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases.

Established and overseen by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the centre will focus on research aimed at easing the burden of asbestos-induced diseases such as mesothelioma.

The new centre will bring together Australia's leading asbestos experts to improve diagnostic tests, develop effective treatments and work toward cures that will relieve the suffering caused by these diseases.