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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

30 June 2008

Hard Work Ahead To Fix Public Hospitals

The annual comprehensive report on our public hospitals shows they are under severe strain, with public hospital admissions increasing faster than population growth.

The State of Our Public Hospitals Report 2008, released today and available at www.health.gov.au/ahca highlights how much work lies ahead of us to deliver a better health and hospital system.

While some results are encouraging, others show the scale of the challenge ahead:

- In 2006-07, public hospital admissions grew by around three per cent - this is more than twice the rate of population growth.
- In 2006-07, there were 6.7 million presentations to emergency departments – the equivalent of a third of Australia’s population.
- The number of patients presenting to emergency departments between 1998-99 and 2006-07 increased by over 34 per cent.
- Three in 10 emergency department patients are not seen within the recommended time.
- All States and Territories, with the exception of NSW, have a lower percentage of people presenting at emergency departments seen in the recommended time than in 1998-99.
- Indigenous Australians represent five per cent of public hospital admissions – but only 2.5 per cent of the Australian population.
- On average, the longest waits for elective surgery procedures are for Knee Replacement (162 days median wait), Septoplasty (median 113 days), and Hip Replacement (median 106 days).

These facts are why the Rudd Government is determined to improve our hospitals.

Already, after just seven months in office, the Government has:

- Invested an extra \$1 billion in public hospitals in the next year – the largest single-year increase in almost a decade
- Committed \$600 million to slashing elective surgery waiting lists
- Established the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, to drive large-scale reform
- Invested \$275 million in 31 GP Super Clinics, to help keep people well and out of hospital

- Begun a wide-ranging review of primary care and the Medicare schedule, to create a greater focus on prevention in our health system
- Committed to establishing a \$10 billion Health and Hospitals Fund, the largest investment in medical infrastructure in Australia's history
- Increased the overall budget for health and ageing to \$50 billion for the first time ever
- Announced a plan to bring almost 10,000 nurses into the health and aged care systems
- Begun work with the States and Territories on a new Australian Health Care Agreement, to end the blame game and improve our hospitals

After eleven years of Liberal neglect – including \$1 billion slashed from public hospitals in 2003 – there is much to be done. While it will take time to turn around a decade of neglect, the Rudd Government is determined to deliver dramatic improvements in health care.

Elective surgery statistics for each state and territory will also be made available today through the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing website www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/elective-surgery

The high numbers of people waiting for elective surgery highlight why the Rudd Government is committed to a \$600 million plan to slash elective surgery waiting lists. The published figures reflect the situation before or only just after the initial tranche of Commonwealth funding began to flow to the States and Territories.

We want to make sure families can get the health care they need, when they need it. It is a big challenge, but one we are committed to.

For media inquiries only, please contact Sean Kelly 0417 108 362

For any general inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220