



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

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South Australians get 24-7 health advice

All South Australians will have access to a free 24-hour, seven-days-a-week health advice line from today.

Federal Minister for Health and Ageing Nicola Roxon, Premier Mike Rann and SA Health Minister John Hill today launched South Australia's branch of *healthdirect Australia*, a national health call centre with a single contact number, **1800 022 222**.

Premier Rann says the new service will provide reassurance for all South Australians – country and city.

“This phone line will be available for all – and it will provide support and information to people seeking advice on their ailments,” he said.

“Callers will be able to speak to an experienced registered nurse, discuss their illness or condition, receive advice and be directed to the care or treatment they need.”

“I lobbied for a national health call centre after seeing how a similar scheme operated in WA,” Premier Rann said.

The Federal Health Minister, Ms Roxon, said, “*healthdirect Australia* will assist busy hospital emergency departments by allowing Australians access to high-quality health advice over the phone. With so many people presenting at emergency departments for non-urgent conditions, this service will provide advice in people's homes.”

“Australians will be better assisted and informed with this national advice line – which will direct people to their required health services, supported by service directories. It can also play a role in any national health emergency.”

Minister Hill said the service would give people free advice and information – meaning they might not have to make a trip to a hospital emergency department.

“It will give people access to 24-hour advice and information, which will help them determine if they should go to hospital or a doctor straight away, whether their illness or condition could be treated by a GP the next day, or if they can manage it themselves,” he said.

However, in the case of medical emergencies, people should always call 000.

Emergency calls coming into the *healthdirect Australia* call centre will be transferred to services such as SA Ambulance as necessary.

Healthdirect Australia is jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government and states and territories. Over four years from 2006-07 the Commonwealth will provide \$96 million, with the states and territories providing \$80 million.

An additional \$20 million, split between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, will enable *healthdirect Australia* to support mental health services.

South Australia's contribution up to 2009-10 will be about \$8.8 million.

Healthdirect Australia staff will not provide diagnosis of illnesses, injuries and ailments, but will assess urgency and direct the caller to the care required.

The health call centre in South Australia started taking calls in July last year, with people ringing hospital emergency departments for health advice being redirected to the service. Since then the number of calls has increased to more than 1000 a week.

From today the service will be opened up to all South Australians.

Feedback from those in the community who have already used the service has been extremely positive.

A survey carried out a month after the call centre began taking calls showed 100 per cent approval, with the community praising the quality of service received.

The reassurance of speaking with a registered nurse, saving time on preventable trips to the local surgery or emergency department and accessibility of immediate professional advice were high on the list of positive reports.

***Healthdirect Australia* will benefit all South Australians by:**

- providing timely and immediate advice on all health care issues
- improving knowledge of health services across the state
- improving health and wellbeing through health promotion, early intervention and prevention
- enabling all South Australians to better manage their own health care.

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