



**THE HON TANYA PLIBERSEK MP**  
**Minister for Health**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**8 May 2012**

**Government Invests in Frontline Health Services**

The Gillard Government will deliver major new health initiatives and continue to support frontline health services for Australian families in the 2012-2013 Budget.

Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said despite continuing to exercise fiscal responsibility, the Government is directing \$74.5 billion to essential health and ageing services, making it easier for patients to access care when and where they need it.

Ms Plibersek said new investment in the health portfolio will focus on areas of need: dental health, rural and regional facilities and aged care. At the same time the Government has made savings and found more efficient ways to fund programs.

“Despite facing a tough budget, the Government has managed to deliver much needed new initiatives for patients including in dental health, additional bowel cancer screening and millions of dollars for health facility construction.”

Ms Plibersek said at the centre of health initiatives in this year’s Budget is a targeted \$515.3 million investment in oral health for Australians who are least able to afford dental care.

“400,000 people who have been waiting for care on public dental waiting lists will benefit from these measures which are a significant step towards a better system of dental care,” Ms Plibersek said.

“This new spending will also provide a boost to the dental workforce and improved dental facilities in rural and remote areas.”

The Government will also prioritise the things that make a difference to Australians’ lives, including front-line services, while we continue to build a strong economy for the future.

The health budget also focuses on rural and regional Australia with \$475 million directed to new and upgraded health and hospital infrastructure across 76 projects in country areas.

Projects include hospital redevelopments, developing community health centres, multi-purpose services, dental facilities and providing training and accommodation facilities for health professionals, in locations across Australia as diverse as Broken Hill, Proserpine, Halls Creek, Mt Isa and Bunbury.

“It’s important that families in rural and regional Australia can access the right care at the right time close to their local communities,” Ms Plibersek said.

The Government is delivering long overdue reform of Australia’s aged care system through a five year, \$3.7 billion package to build a better, fairer and more nationally consistent aged care system. This will enable older Australians to get the help they deserve so they can remain living in their own homes for as long as possible.

“Older Australians will always be a priority for the Gillard Government and benefit significantly in this Budget,” Ms Plibersek said.

The Government will also invest \$49.7 million to expand the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

“Under the expanded National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, screening will be offered to people turning 60 years of age from 2013 and 70 years of age from 2015, with biennial screening phased in from 2017-18,” Ms Plibersek said.

Evidence shows that biennial screening has the potential to reduce these cancers by 15 per cent to 25 per cent and prevent between 300 and 500 Australian deaths annually.

Ms Plibersek said the Government was also committed to further modernising the Australian health system and was investing an additional \$233.7 million into the continued rollout of the national electronic health records system, which will reduce errors and duplication of services.

While protecting frontline care, the Government will also implement targeted and responsible savings that reduce waste, achieve greater efficiency and direct precious dollars to where they have the greatest health benefit.

“Some items under the Extended Medicare Safety Net will be capped to discourage excessive fees and to prevent people from misusing Medicare to pay for cosmetic surgery,” Minister Plibersek said.

The Private Health Insurance Rebate will be paid for insurance products that cover natural therapy services only where the Chief Medical Officer finds there is clear evidence they are clinically effective.

The Government will also tighten regulations around diagnostic radiology services to ensure that imaging is carried out by appropriately qualified practitioners.

**For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220**