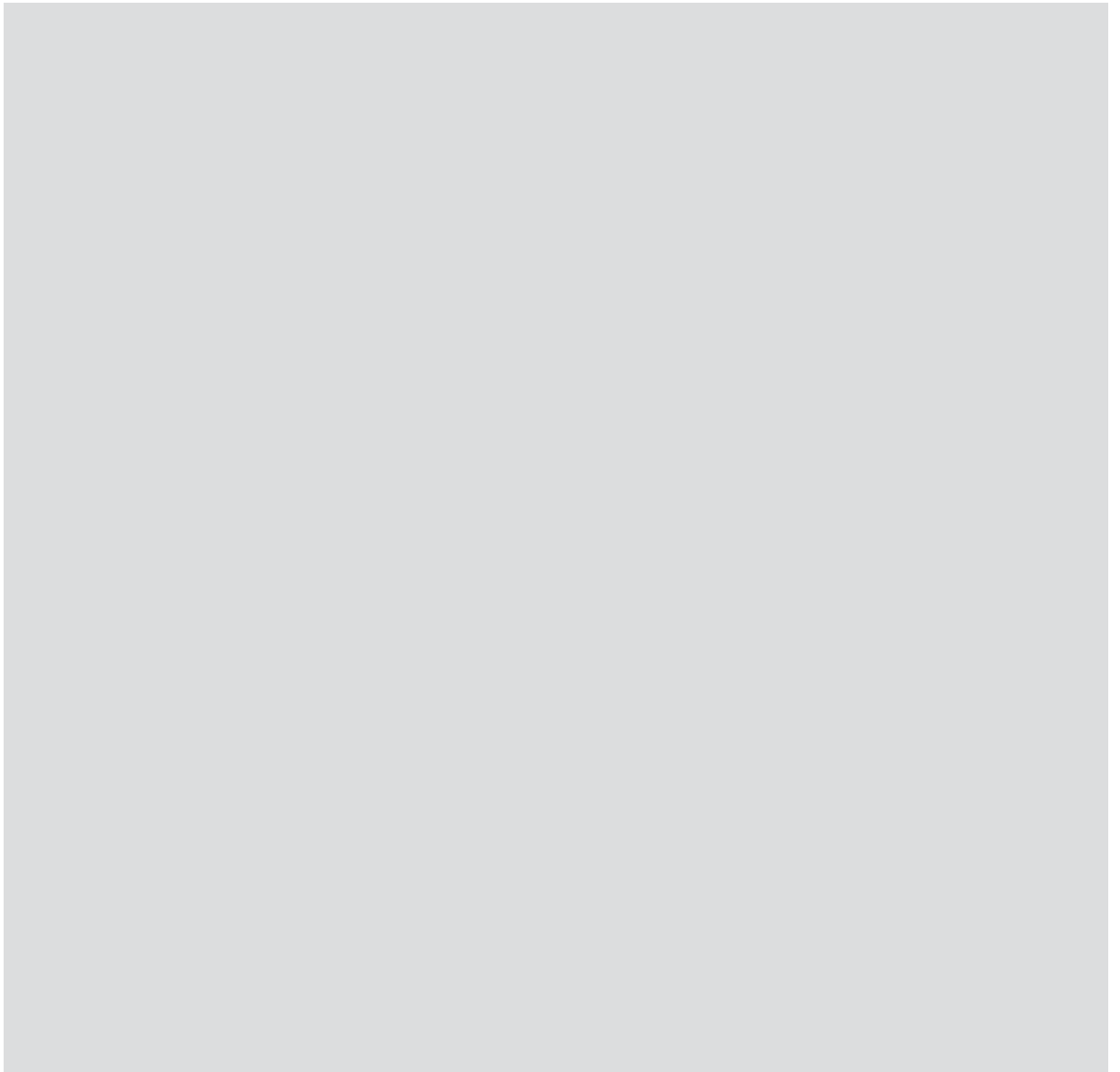




National Platform



Chapter 8: Preparing for Australia's future health needs

Introduction

- 1 Australia's future depends on our ability to tackle the long-term health challenges. Just as past Labor governments took the far-sighted step of building Medicare, Labor is undertaking significant reforms that are needed to place health care on a sustainable basis, long into the future. This will require extensive changes to meet a range of new health care demands arising from increased rates of chronic disease and the demands of an ageing population.
- 2 It will also require a far greater focus on prevention and wellbeing. Keeping people well and out of hospital will deliver benefits not only to individuals but to the entire health system, taking pressure off our strained hospitals and allowing governments to use existing resources more effectively.
- 3 Health is important to all Australians, at both a personal and a national level. Personally, health affects everything we do—how we work, the time we spend with our children and loved ones, what we can do in our free time. Nationally, health has a significant economic impact. Good health boosts productivity and improves workplace participation. A healthier country delivers a stronger economy. Our health reforms are helping Australians live longer and healthier lives.

Labor values

- 4 Labor believes that Australia's public health system should enable all Australians to reach their full potential by providing certainty of care if or when it is needed. Universal health care is a public good, fosters broader goals of equity and fairness across our community.
- 5 Labor believes that a good public health system is the foundation of security, opportunity and equality for any society, allowing families and individuals to cope with unanticipated health issues.
- 6 Central to the continuing strength of our health system is a commitment to universal care. Labor is committed to the future of Medicare. Labor built Medicare and only Labor has supported Medicare. It is central to our vision of a fairer Australia.
- 7 Labor believes that public hospital policy and funding should be implemented as the result of a cooperative reform process between the federal, state and territory governments.
- 8 Labor is committed to families being able to access high-quality and affordable health care, including any necessary medicines, wherever they live.
- 9 Labor believes a strong and sustainable health system depends on both public and private health sectors, which complement each other and provide individuals with choices and guarantees of social inclusion.
- 10 Labor values the role of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who work tirelessly to care for Australians. It is a priority to ensure that training opportunities are increased to continue to provide high-quality health services in the future.
- 11 Labor believes that tackling the mounting challenges in the health system, including those caused by increased rates of chronic disease and the demands of an ageing population can only be achieved through far more attention to primary care and prevention.

- 12 Labor believes the ageing of the population presents opportunities to be harnessed by both the individual and society more broadly. The average 65 year old today is better educated, wealthier and vastly healthier than their parents were at the same age.
- 13 Because of the vast disparities in health in our community, and because chronic diseases disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, Labor believes a focus on prevention and delivering universal health care, will play important roles in ending inequity.
- 14 Equity in access to health care for our Indigenous Australians is a guiding principle of Labor's approach. Labor is committed to closing the appalling gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- 15 Labor's commitment to equitable access to health care includes recognising the specific health needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex Australians.
- 16 Labor believes that increased transparency and accountability will improve the performance of health services and give individuals greater choice in the provision of their own health care.

Labor achievements

Public hospitals

We have:

- delivered record investments in health and the biggest health reforms since Labor introduced Medicare. Our historic agreement shows we get things done and will deliver a better deal for patients with more doctors, more nurses and more beds
- after years of neglect, increased hospital funding by 50 per cent (or \$20 billion) in 2008, and delivered a further \$20 billion from 2011 representing an additional \$175 billion of Commonwealth investment in hospitals to 2029–30
- partnered with states and territories to equally share the burden of increasing hospital costs — and providing federal funds direct to Local Hospital Networks through a single national funding pool
- increased the number of elective surgery operations delivered in Australia by more than 70,000 in 2008–09 and 2009–10
- introduced new targets for faster elective surgery and emergency department care, with reward funding for states and territories that deliver results
- begun delivering over 1300 new sub-acute beds and services across Australia, over and above an additional 433 hospital beds opened between 2007–08 and 2009–10
- over 460 projects underway in 370 hospitals to improve emergency department, elective surgery and sub-acute care
- introduced greater local governance of public hospital services with Local Hospital Networks being established around Australia
- created more cancer services — building 24 Regional Cancer Centres to bring services closer to patients
- upgraded the nation's health infrastructure with a \$5 billion Health and Hospitals Fund including \$1.8 billion for critical upgrades to hospitals and health services for regional Australians
- provided more information and greater accountability to the community through public performance reporting on the MyHospitals website
- committed to a sustainable public and private health system. Under Labor over 860,000 extra people have taken out private health insurance.

Primary and preventive health care

We have:

- began building 64 GP Super Clinics and we are expanding 425 existing General Practice clinics
- by 2014, have doubled the number of GPs in training
- commenced training more than 6000 extra doctors over ten years, including 5500 extra GPs and 680 extra specialists
- introduced a GP after hours help line to make it easier for families to get help when they need it
- increased the number of nurses training at universities by over 1000 every year and we will be supporting 4600 nurses in General Practice
- started getting GPs and specialists closer to home by providing incentives to work in rural and regional Australia
- connected regional and outer metropolitan Australians to medical specialists through new videoconferencing TeleHealth services, utilising the power of broadband
- provided nurse practitioners and midwives rights under Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for the first time
- begun establishing a network of Medicare Locals around Australia to better coordinate and expand primary health care services and addressing local needs
- started investing \$2.2 billion in the largest ever mental health reform package, focusing on early intervention and coordinated care
- delivered more dental check-ups — more than 1.3 million dental check-ups have been provided under the Medicare Teen Dental Plan
- invested \$1.6 billion in a national partnership to close the gap on Indigenous health. 49,000 Indigenous health assessments were provided in 2010–11, an increase of over 64 per cent over 2009–10
- committed to personally controlled eHealth records for all Australians who want them; saving patients from repeating their medical history every time they need assistance
- established the Australian National Preventive Health Agency to lead policy development to help reduce preventable health issues
- led the world in the fight against tobacco — including being the first country in the world to introduce plain packaging of tobacco products
- taken action to address binge drinking by closing the loop hole that allowed cheaper ready to drink “alcopop” drinks and we are implementing national and community programs to address this social problem
- addressed obesity and other preventative health issues through national and community campaigns under our record \$872 million investment
- added over 500 medicines and vaccines to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and National Immunisation Program, worth over \$5 billion
- invested \$151 million to improve organ donation rates and transplants in Australia.

Labor priorities

A hospital system that works

- 17 Labor recognises the central role played by hospitals in health care in Australia, and supports the roles of both public and private hospitals, while believing firmly in the need for a high-quality public hospital system accessible to all Australians.
- 18 Labor is committed to significant reform of the public hospital system, anticipating increasing demand in coming years due to higher rates of chronic disease and an ageing population.
- 19 Labor will implement the cooperative health reform agreement between the federal, state and territory governments that will increase the funding, transparency and efficiency of Australian public hospitals. Different governments must work together, never forgetting that their first duty is to the patient.
- 20 Labor is committed to cooperatively funding the increased costs of health services through the system of Activity Based Funding to drive efficiency in the performance of public hospitals. Labor will improve accountability of federal funding by directing funding through a national funding pool to Local Hospital Networks.
- 21 Labor will continue to direct funding to the states and territories to strengthen our public hospitals, and to improve services in areas including elective surgery, emergency services, and sub-acute care, measures that have been agreed successfully through the Council of Australian Governments' reform processes.
- 22 Labor will use measures such as reward funding to improve the performance of public hospitals in elective surgery, emergency departments so that less Australians have to wait lengthy times for important treatment. Labor will continue to build on important transparency measures, such as MyHospitals, so that the performance of public hospitals is transparently reported to Australians.
- 23 In line with these achievements, Labor will:
 - foster cooperation between all levels of government to improve health services, and to ensure accountability in relation to expenditure of health funding
 - build on existing investments in hospitals to ensure states and territories are equipped to deliver the health infrastructure that is needed
 - expand and reform the health workforce so families can get the health care they need, when and where they need it
 - invest in prevention and primary care, to take pressure off hospitals by keeping people well
 - deliver specific services to improve the health of Indigenous Australians
 - focus on improving continuity and coordination of care, especially for Australians with complex and ongoing care needs
 - deliver eHealth systems that allow patients to ensure their health information is available for both their hospital and primary care health practitioners
 - provide mechanisms for genuine community input, including for the purposes of identifying areas of need, into the provision of local health services
 - Labor is firmly committed to the principle of an excellent universal public hospital system and will not pursue the privatisation of the public hospital system.
- 24 Labor will continue to:
 - expand access to primary health care services that will help people to avoid hospital
 - work on tackling health problems that deliver large numbers of people to hospitals, such as tobacco related disease, binge drinking and avoidable GP-type presentations
 - invest in hospital infrastructure to improve services, capacity and the use of technology
 - train high-quality staff to work in public hospitals.

- 25 Labor will continue to work to increase the number of Australians seen on time for elective surgery, building on the progress already made that delivered over 70,000 extra surgery operations.
- 26 Labor is committed to improving transparency and accountability in our hospitals, both public and private. Labor believes that significant reform can be achieved by increasing local involvement in the management of hospital services through Local Hospital Networks and transparent performance measures. Labor is also committed to using reward payments to encourage state and territory innovation and results.
- 27 Labor will work with the states and territories to implement national health reform to implement much more stringent, nationally consistent public performance reporting across hospitals, and to work towards delivering an activity-based hospital funding model.
- 28 Labor will continue to work to:
- ensure hospital performance data is reported in a nationally consistent manner
 - expand hospital safety and quality reporting to private hospitals
 - ensure that public performance reporting is expanded across all areas of health, beyond hospitals
 - ensure that people have the information they need to make informed choices about their health care.
- 29 Labor believes that government is best placed to deliver a strong and quality public health system which is focused on patient care and positive health outcomes. Everyone should have access to quality public health, irrespective of their capacity to pay.

Medicare

- 30 Labor believes that Medicare is an integral part of Australia's high-quality health system. Since Labor established Medicare in 1984, it has ensured all Australians have access to high-quality, affordable health care.
- 31 Labor believes that Medicare should be retained, defended and strengthened. Labor is opposed to allowing individuals to opt out of Medicare and is opposed to the direct or indirect means testing of Medicare and bulk billing. Medicare should remain the universal, fully funded system for all Australians.
- 32 Labor is committed to strengthening Medicare to meet future challenges by:
- ensuring all Australians have fair access to Medicare and to bulk-billed GP and specialist services
 - making the promotion of wellness and the prevention of disease a focus of Medicare
 - achieving better continuity of care for patients and better integration between Medicare services, acute care and aged care
 - developing a more flexible Medicare to enable access to genuine multidisciplinary care delivered by the health care teams of the future
 - ensuring better access to GP services after hours and for those in residential aged care
 - expanding the number of practice nurses in General Practice
 - cutting red tape that hinders doctors and takes valuable time away from treating patients
 - maintaining Labor's reforms that have granted Medicare access for nurse practitioners and midwives.
- 33 Labor will continue to build and develop Medicare Locals to coordinate and enhance primary health care services in local communities. These organisations will be able to identify and address gaps in the local delivery of services, and address unmet need.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

- 34 Labor is committed to ensuring that all Australians have affordable access to essential medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Labor has added over 500 medicines, worth more than \$4 billion, and undertaken reform to ensure it is more sustainable for the future. Labor will:
- ensure thorough and timely evaluation of new medicines before their approval for use in Australia
 - ensure that medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme remain affordable
 - ensure that all medicines available in Australia are safe
 - work to reduce the harm caused by the misuse of pharmaceuticals, through inadvertent misuse of prescription drugs or fraudulent abuse of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
 - support the expansion of eHealth that will help to reduce medication errors
 - support the continuing growth of the Australian pharmaceutical industry and recognise its potential to generate jobs and exports for Australia.

A world-class health system: supporting public and private health

- 35 Labor believes the public and private sectors are both crucial for giving Australia a world-class health system. Under Labor, almost a million extra Australians have taken out private hospital cover. While governments have sole responsibility for managing the public health sector, they must also support, strengthen and ensure sustainable private health care.

- 36 Labor will:
- make all efforts to support both public and private health sectors
 - ensure that public and private health services complement each other
 - ensure that all necessary services are provided in the public health system
 - work to improve both systems by encouraging competition, innovation and new uses of both public and private health providers
 - retain Medibank Private in public ownership
 - apply high standards to the provision of both public and private health services including the reporting of both public and private hospital performance information on the MyHospitals website
 - encourage public and private hospitals to work together, including for the provision of elective surgery
 - regulate the private health industry to ensure that value-for-money products are available to all policy holders
 - work to eliminate surprise gap payments for private health insurance holders
 - work to increase the sustainability of private health insurance for Australians
 - work to ensure the benefits of private health insurance rebates are provided to those Australians who need them most — consistent with Labor principles
 - ensure that patient choice and clinical decision-making remain at the heart of health care
 - ensure that every Australian has access to high-quality health care and dental care, through the public and private sectors.

Tackling chronic disease

- 37 Labor recognises that levels of chronic disease are a strong indicator of socioeconomic status in Australia, disproportionately disadvantaging poorer communities. This makes tackling chronic disease part of Labor's mission.
- 38 In its efforts to tackle chronic disease, Labor will address this disparity by:
- specifically targeting the causes of chronic disease in economically disadvantaged communities through working with local government and Medicare Locals
 - establishing Medicare Locals around Australia that will work with local clinicians to better integrate and expand services to better treat and prevent chronic disease
 - expanding the provision of primary health care services through GP Super Clinics, upgrades to existing GP practices, training of GPs, TeleHealth and improved access to afterhours services.
 - targeting prevention programs at these communities including working with local government
 - taking world leading action to combat smoking
 - working with the Australian National Preventive Health Agency to further develop preventative health policies and solutions
 - working with local communities to develop effective local solutions to combat rising levels of chronic disease
 - ensuring that health services are able to be accessed by all Australians, wherever they live
 - trialling the introduction of innovative models for management of diabetes.

Promoting wellness, preventing disease

- 39 Labor believes that primary care and prevention must play central roles in the Australian health system.
- 40 Labor believes that we cannot allow a situation in which our children may have a lower life expectancy than adults currently enjoy. Labor believes in national leadership to improve the health of Australians and particularly Australian children. This is a vital social priority as well as an urgent economic priority. Australia cannot afford to compound the challenges of an ageing society by having an increasing number of working age adults outside the labour force and in need of medical care because of preventable chronic and complex conditions.
- 41 Labor recognises that health maintenance, promotion and illness prevention will have vital roles to play in combating the rise of preventable chronic diseases, and that the responsibility for this rests primarily with governments. Progress will, however, also require substantial changes in personal behaviour, which can only be achieved and sustained with the active participation of all levels of government, the non-government sector, health professionals, local communities, and individuals.
- 42 To enhance preventative health efforts, Labor will:
- seek to intervene early in the lives of children, to encourage healthy habits for life
 - take clear steps to cut down on binge-drinking, especially youth binge-drinking
 - take strong action to tackle illicit drug use
 - continue world leading policies to reduce smoking levels
 - encourage health professionals to provide advice to people about improving their lifestyles, in order to reduce significant health problems and hospital admissions
 - examine what interventions can be taken across the broader community to encourage healthy lifestyles, including working with the Australian National Preventative Health Agency

- work with all levels of government, local communities, health professionals and individuals to find new ways to encourage Australians to live longer, healthier lives
- undertake health education and social marketing programs, including programs targeted at Indigenous Australians and Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds
- recognise that mental health and wellbeing can only be achieved by activities across a spectrum and develop programs in health promotion, illness prevention and relapse prevention, as well as treatment, recovery and disability services.

Access to frontline care in the community

- 43 Labor is committed to providing families with the health care they need, when and where they need it. Labor will continue to invest in delivering GP Super Clinics, with multidisciplinary care and convenient access to a range of health professionals.
- 44 Labor will address the shortfall in health professionals through its increases in GP training places, as well as funding for health workforce training across various professions.
- 45 To improve the access of families to the frontline care they need, Labor will:
- establish further Medicare Locals around Australia to better coordinate primary health care
 - build more GP Super Clinics and continue to upgrade existing GP infrastructure to allow for more services and training to be delivered
 - expand and better coordinate after hours GP care
 - continue to encourage the use of TeleHealth services
 - promote the development of multidisciplinary care by primary health care teams
 - continue to invest in training extra health professionals, particularly in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas of need
 - continue to provide incentives for primary health professionals to work in regional areas
 - invest further in primary health care infrastructure, including in rural and regional Australia
 - increase the transparency of performance of the primary health care system through new reporting of performance and outcomes
 - continue to support roles for nurse practitioners and midwives to have access to Medicare and the PBS.

Sexual and reproductive health

- 46 To improve reproductive health for men and women, Labor will:
- provide universal access to fertility advice and control programs and advice on the safe use of contraceptives
 - support the rights of women to determine their own reproductive lives, particularly the right to choose appropriate fertility control and abortion and ensure that these choices are on the basis of sound social and medical advice
 - fund research into the prevention of infertility and fertility control and ensure that access to assisted reproductive technology programs is not determined by economic circumstances or any other form of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status
 - enforce a ban on the cloning of human beings.
- 47 Labor recognises the importance of renewing efforts to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, STIs and blood borne viruses, in partnership with the NGO sector.

Lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex health

- 48 Labor recognises that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people are a priority population with specific health needs, for whom promoting equitable access requires targeted programs. Labor will:
- continue to develop health strategies to address the needs of LGBTI people, working in partnership with these communities
 - continue to support the LGBTI health peak bodies for their work and consult with these bodies on health issues affecting them
 - continue to provide training for health care workers about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, and research about LGBTI issues
 - continue to support programs aimed at prevention of suicide for high risk groups, including LGBTI Australians
 - include issues relevant to LGBTI Australians, and the views of LGBTI seniors, in aged care planning and service provision
 - provide for the needs of young LGBTI Australians, particularly in rural areas
 - continue to ensure that Medicare and the PBS supports anti-discriminatory policies for LGBTI Australians and that same sex couples and their families can access Medicare and the PBS as a family.

Child and maternal health

- 49 To build on Labor's investments in child and maternal health, including investment in universal perinatal screening, nurse home visiting programs, Healthy Kids Checks, Healthy Children preventative health projects and programs to improve Indigenous child and maternal health, Labor will:
- improve the promotion and provision of perinatal services, including depression screening, prevention and treatment
 - improve the information available to mothers about the options available for childbirth regardless of income or geographical location
 - continue to support the ability for midwives to access Medicare and PBS services
 - ensure continuity of care is available after a baby is born
 - continue to implement special programs for Indigenous mothers and babies, to reduce mortality rates and improve health
 - support and encourage breastfeeding
 - work to increase the proportion of children born at a healthy birth weight
 - make high-quality dental services available across the community
 - continue to expand preventative health programs such as Healthy Children programs and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Gardens scheme
 - adjust the Healthy Kids check to include social and emotional wellbeing.
- 50 Labor is committed to improving the health outcomes of Australian women, and implementing policies to encourage the health system to be more responsive to the needs of women. Labor will:
- implement the new National Women's Health Policy—the first in almost 20 years
 - take account of the special needs of LGBTI women, including the provision of culturally appropriate health services

- continue to implement policies to address peri natal depression, to improve prevention, early detection and support services for expectant and new mothers
- continue to improve services and choices available to women, building upon access to Medicare and the PBS for midwives, more workforce support, and support services
- continue to roll out state of the art digital mammography equipment for Breast Screen Australia
- support and boost cancer research, treatment and support services, and will establish up to 24 regional cancer centres.

51 Labor will work with LGBTI communities to identify areas of anomaly, inconsistency and need, with a view to ensuring that those health needs are met.

Men's health

52 Labor is committed to improving the health outcomes of Australian men, recognising that men are generally poor at visiting their GPs and seeking care when it is needed. Labor will continue to:

- implement the National Men's Health Policy—the first such policy in Australia's history
- develop and implement policies aimed at improving male mental health and addressing the issue of male suicide
- address the gap in life expectancy between males and females
- implement policies and programs designed to address issues of prostate and bowel cancer, including the continuation of bowel cancer screening.

53 Labor will consult with the LGBTI communities about the specific health needs of gay and bisexual men, and men of transgender or intersex background, and about the provision of culturally appropriate health services, and will ensure their appropriate resourcing and promotion.

Indigenous health

54 Labor believes that significant improvement in health outcomes for Indigenous Australians is essential to closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

55 Labor has undertaken significant reform and investment since 2008 to:

- tackle chronic disease, particularly renal diseases
- reduce smoking rates among Indigenous Australians
- preventative health
- building health workforce capacity, including in Indigenous health organisations.

56 Labor is providing assistance to Indigenous health organisations to establish best practice management and quality care standards, and investing in the upgrade of airstrips in remote areas to enable better access to transport, medical and essential services in those areas. Labor is also expanding the Access to Allied Psychological Services Program as well as other initiatives relevant to Indigenous Australians in the National Mental Health Reform package.

Young people

- 57 Labor also recognises that young people have specific health needs. Labor will:
- place a particular focus on young people's health needs, including physical and mental health issues, age appropriate service, access to impartial medical advice, privacy of medical records, drug and alcohol education and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle
 - adopt an integrated health-based approach to youth suicide that works with existing community structures, including strategies to address depression, neglect, abuse, drug and alcohol problems, access to firearms, homophobia, school and workplace bullying, other forms of discrimination and other contributing factors.

Drug strategy

- 58 Labor will continue to respond to the tragedy of alcohol and other drug abuse and related community impact with early intervention, effective treatment and harm minimisation policies. Labor will continue to support comprehensive demand and supply reduction strategies and law enforcement. Labor is committed to an evidence-based strategy for dealing with alcohol and other drugs that aims to approach individual alcohol and other drug issues from a health and welfare perspective and includes:
- address drug abuse through national and community campaigns to help reduce preventable health issues
 - improving safety in the community by reducing the level of drug-related crime
 - reducing the spread of illness
 - keeping people alive
 - finding new ways to reduce the use, harm and supply of illicit drugs in our community.

Mental health

- 59 Labor has made mental health a national priority by delivering a significant investment of \$2.2 billion in reform and committing to ongoing action through a Ten Year Roadmap for Reform. The reform will focus on prevention and early intervention and deliver a more integrated mental health care system.
- 60 One in five Australians experienced mental illness in the previous twelve months, nearly one-third will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. The current system can be too crisis-driven and lacks sufficient focus on recovery and assisting people to participate in the community through areas such as employment. People can experience difficulty accessing services and navigating a fragmented and complex system. The National Mental Health Reform package includes investment to:
- improve demand management to allow mental health services to focus more on recovery, and be less crisis-driven
 - expand services and provide a single point of contact for people with severe mental illness to coordinate clinical and social support services
 - provide prevention and early intervention mental health services for all age groups and especially children and young people
 - improve access to the primary health care system for people with mental illness
 - establish a new National Partnership to help guide reform at a state level.

61 The mental health package will expand effective services. The package includes 30 new Headspace sites, to achieve national coverage of 90 sites across the country and additional programs based on the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centres model. It will also direct funding to achieve more coordinated services, such as ensuring that, for the first time, patients with severe and debilitating mental illness have one point of contact to coordinate services to meet their clinical and social care needs.

62 Labor is also establishing a new, independent National Mental Health Commission. The Commission will independently monitor, assess and report to the Parliament and the community on how the system is performing. This will increase public accountability and transparency in the mental health system and give greater national prominence to mental health issues. The Commission will publicly report on a range of performance indicators in an annual public mental health report card. The commission will focus on transparency and accountability for mental health funding and outcomes across Australia. The Commission will engage with key stakeholders in the development of the report card.

63 Labor recognises that many people struggle to access services and believes that all Australians should be able to access the appropriate mental health services when and where they need them. Labor is committed to ongoing public health education to break down the barriers to care and stigma attached to mental health issues. We commit to policies aimed at supporting and promoting good mental health and well being and policies which encourage Australians to access mental health care early.

64 We also know that people with severe mental illness are some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded people in Australia and that more and better coordinated services, both clinical and non clinical, are needed.

65 Mental health has long been neglected and that greater investment and increased transparency and accountability are needed in the mental health system. Labor also recognises the specific mental health needs of particular population groups such as Indigenous Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTI people and people living in rural and remote areas.

66 Labor is committed to ongoing national mental health reform and will focus on improving the lives of people with mental illness by:

- helping to detect potential mental health problems in the early years and supporting young people who struggle with mental illness
- targeting support to areas and communities that need it most such as Indigenous communities and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas that are underserved by the current system
- providing more intensive support services, and better coordinating those services for people with severe and persistent mental illness who have complex care needs
- taking a cross-sectoral approach to mental health and providing greater transparency and accountability in the system
- investing in medical research to increase understanding of the causes of mental illness and improve medical treatments.

67 Labor believes that investing in community mental health and supporting the families and carers of Australians with mental illness is critical to providing appropriate care and support for people with mental illness. Labor has:

- expanded community mental health services that help people live more independent lives and reconnect with the wider community, supporting them across their life, as well as responding to their clinical needs

- improved support for people with mental illness to participate in the workforce — recognising the benefits of work and the low level of workforce participation among people with mental illness— by expanding links between community mental health services and employment services
- provided core respite and support for family members and carers of people with severe mental illness, in recognition of the importance of the supportive role played by family members and carers and of the demands faced by carers of people with severe mental illness
- helped to prevent and address homelessness among people with severe mental illness.

68 Labor is committed to continuing the key role of government in leading and promoting reform of Australia's mental health service system. Labor will work in partnership with the states and territories to:

- ensure more seamless services that respond flexibly to people's needs and follow of a recovery oriented approach
- ensure that reform efforts are focused on meeting service gaps, stabilising the mental health system and rebuilding the workforce in order to create a solid base on which to grow innovation
- ensure a comprehensive range of community based and bed-based public mental health services, which give priority to community-oriented mental health care
- ensure mental health policy and services have a strong focus on illness prevention and early intervention for all age groups
- encourage improved access to appropriate housing for people with mental illness and associated disabilities, by providing a range of long term, affordable housing with flexible support, including accommodation with 24 hour staffing support
- ensure mental health services are well integrated with other relevant services such as employment, housing and GPs develop an open and transparent system of evaluation and accountability
- develop an open and transparent system of evaluation and accountability.

69 Labor will continue to support the mental health workforce and provide more support for rural and regional mental health services. Labor will:

- ensure the implementation of the new national mental health workforce strategy
- improve the supply of mental health nurses by encouraging innovative training options at the undergraduate level, including the option to major in mental health in single or double degree courses.
- expand VET sector training options for the mental health sector workers, including enrolled nurses and peer workers
- seek to improve the retention of psychiatrists and psychologists in the public system, and will work with state and territory governments with a focus in areas such as outer suburban areas and rural and regional areas
- ensure greater access to psychological services and other allied health services is available in rural and remote as well as outer suburban areas that currently are not well serviced by the fee-based Medicare system.

70 Labor recognises that suicide is a national tragedy that has devastating impacts on individuals, families and communities.

71 Labor will redouble the national efforts to prevent the tragedy of suicide including:

- provide services to those at greatest risk of suicide
- focus on direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention through identifying and addressing the causes of suicide, ensuring crisis counselling services are available and improving safety at suicide 'hotspots'

- provide services and support to men — who are at greatest risk of suicide, but least likely to seek help
- support community led suicide prevention activities that target those particularly at risk including: Indigenous Australians, men, LGBTI people and families bereaved through suicide
- promote good mental health and resilience in young people, to prevent suicide later in life.

72 Labor recognises that LGBTI Australians are a group at high risk of mental illness, in particular depression and suicidal ideation, because of issues such as discrimination and harassment. Labor has identified this group as a priority and will ensure services and resources are targeted to address the needs of this community.

73 Labor will work with and consult closely with the experts, including through the new National Mental Health Commission and an Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council.

Health workforce

74 Labor wants to boost Australia's health workforce—by training more doctors, nurses and other health professionals and making greater use of the skills and expertise of all health professionals. Labor will continue to build a strong health workforce and prepare Australia's health system for the challenges of the future.

75 Labor believes that all efforts must be made to ensure there is an adequate supply of highly trained doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and medical educators to all parts of the nation, so all Australians can access the health care they need.

76 Labor supports doctors to work as part of multidisciplinary care teams, to deliver a better range of services to patients and improve the standard of health care available to all Australians.

Doctors

77 Labor will:

- ensure that Australia educates and trains enough doctors to ensure they are available when and where they are needed by patients
- continue the expansion of GP and specialist doctor training places across Australia
- expand the number of emergency department doctors training in hospitals
- provide incentives to improve the supply of doctors and other health professionals to rural and regional Australia, for example by providing relief from higher education fees and/or debts (such as HECS) for those prepared to give return of service commitments through practice in non-urban areas
- work to improve the retention of doctors in the workforce
- deliver high-quality training facilities for GP training
- develop a National Training Plan with the first ever national health workforce body, Health Workforce Australia
- continue to provide medical education resources and provision of clinical educational and practice supervisors for interns and related professions
- work with both the public and private sectors to develop new training opportunities for doctors

- promote an increase in the number of people from linguistically and ethnically diverse backgrounds at all levels of the health workforce
- increase the numbers of Indigenous Australians at all levels of the health workforce, including through the new medical school in the Northern Territory
- create Lead Clinician Groups that will allow input for doctors, nurses and allied health practitioners on national and local clinical matters
- continue to support TeleHealth for the provision of specialist medical care
- support the national registration system for health care professionals
- provide incentives for health professionals to work in regional areas.

Nurses

78 Labor will continue to work to support nurses and their role in the health care system, including continuing to expand training opportunities, expanding and supporting employment opportunities through primary and acute settings and by continuing to support the extended role of midwives and nurse practitioners.

79 To support and strengthen the nursing workforce, Labor will:

- invest in providing nurses with the clinical training they need
- ensure sufficient university and VET places are available to nursing students
- recognise the valuable role nurses play, and provide nurses with the ongoing training and support they need to expand that role
- continue to support the expanded role for nurse practitioners and midwives, with access to Medicare and the PBS
- Labor believes that multidisciplinary team-based care is an important element of our health system, and that allied health professionals have an important role to play in such teams. By providing access to allied health professionals in convenient locations, GP Super Clinics make it simpler and easier to access the care that families need
- invest in expanding and supporting the aged care workforce
- expand the workforce of practice nurses in the provision of primary health care
- expand the number of scholarships for education and training in mental health and emergency nursing.

Allied health professionals

80 Labor recognises the critical role of allied health professionals in delivering good health outcomes for the community. Labor will:

- invest to provide allied and ancillary health professionals with the clinical training they need, including access to adequate supervised practice placements
- work with Medicare Locals to ensure allied health professionals are better integrated into local primary health care services
- ensure sufficient university and VET places are available for allied health professionals across Australia in areas such as social work, occupational therapy, psychology, primary health promotion counselling, family welfare services and peer support workers
- encourage and foster multidisciplinary team-based care.

Health support workers

- 81 Labor recognises the important work of health support workers in our hospitals and understands their important role in the health community. Without the contribution of these workers, the health system could not function properly. Labor will:
- continue to support fair pay and conditions and dignity at work for health support workers
 - continue to work through Health Workforce Australia to ensure the sustainability of the health workforce
 - continue to support sustainable funding for Local Hospital Networks to ensure sufficient workers can be employed to meet health needs
 - support these workers and their unions to ensure a high quality public health system is maintained.

Regional and rural health

- 82 Labor recognises the historic difficulties that Australians in regional and rural areas have faced in accessing health care compared to people in more urban areas, and that this has contributed to their poorer health status. Labor also understands that lower levels of rural health are compounded by socioeconomic inequalities. Our commitment to regional health is part of a wider rural policy that aims to restore the economic health of regional, rural and remote Australia.
- 83 Labor has already increased funding for regional health programs by 150 per cent. Labor investments have included new health infrastructure through the Health and Hospitals Fund and Rural Education Infrastructure Development Pool, a new regional health agency and greater training places for health professionals in regional Australia. GP Super Clinics, 34 of which will be in regional Australia, will also help strengthen services available in areas of need. We have also expanded several programs designed to bolster the health workforce in rural and regional areas, including relevant scholarship programs.
- 84 Labor will:
- continue to invest in training the regional and rural health workforce
 - increase local governance of health services through Local Hospital Networks and Medicare Locals
 - focus on providing opportunities for students to train in regional and rural areas, to encourage them to return to those areas once their training is completed, and to foster an appreciation of the challenges and rewards involved in practicing in areas of need
 - continue to invest in programs designed to bolster the health workforce in rural and regional areas
 - provide greater education and professional support to rural doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals to reduce the pressure they currently experience
 - support measures to encourage doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other crucial health professionals to relocate and remain in rural and remote communities
 - continue to invest in infrastructure to expand hospitals, primary health facilities, training facilities and other health services in regional Australia
 - provide Medicare rebates for regional Australians to access specialist doctors via TeleHealth services, benefiting from Labor's investment in the NBN
 - make specific efforts to reduce the rate of youth suicide in rural communities, especially among young Aboriginal people and young males
 - protect remote public hospital services through the allocation of block funding for services with low levels of activity

- expand the number of sub acute beds available in regional Australia through Multi-Purpose Services facilities
- address practical barriers to access to mental health and dementia care services for those living outside urban areas, including through provision of services where people live, or nearby, rather than hundreds of kilometres away in regional cities
- improve coordination between public, private and non-government health care providers including the Royal Flying Doctor Service
- recognise that rural and remote communities have significant Aboriginal populations.

The health system of the future

85 Labor recognises the role of new technology in delivering major benefits in health care, including making health services more effective, more accessible, more consumer friendly and reducing the potential for medical errors. Health will be a major beneficiary from the opportunities presented by the establishment of the NBN. At the same time, technological change needs to be carefully managed with close attention to the social and ethical implications and the need for privacy.

86 To drive better use of new technologies, Labor will:

- allow all Australians the opportunity to apply for a personally controlled electronic health records that will help to improve the coordination of care, reduce duplication, and reduce the opportunity for medical or medication errors
- establish eHealth records with appropriate privacy and security protocols to protect consumers' rights
- over time integrate eHealth records with hospital, pathology, diagnostic imaging, medication and other clinical systems
- continue the rollout of TeleHealth services for specialist medical care in outer metropolitan, regional and remote settings and in aged care facilities and this will be delivered without any reduction of in-person access to medical specialists
- continue to work with clinicians, consumers and the ICT industry to deliver more health care solutions into people's own homes—delivering benefits from the NBN.

Investing in health and medical research

87 Australia has long boasted some of the best scientists, researchers and medical pioneers in the world. The successes of our researchers—both as individuals and part of organisations—have meant less disease, better treatment, improved quality of life and longer life spans for Australians. All Australians benefit from the outcomes of health and medical research, particularly when that research is translated into improved primary and hospital care, aged care, or better preventative health strategies. Our national economy also benefits as research findings lead to the development of innovative new industries and the productivity benefits associated with better health outcomes.

88 Labor will seek to maintain Australia's reputation as a world leader in high quality, innovative research and development activities and will:

- continue to invest in world-class public and private sector health and medical research
- encourage private industry to increase its investment in Australian-based research and development
- ensure health policy is evidence-based, and that clinical practice is similarly grounded in best-practice, based on the best available health and medical research

- ensure that comprehensive ethical guidelines to cover both public and private sector research are developed and regularly reviewed and recognise the integrity and intrinsic worth of the human person. We will oppose initiatives such as human cloning, which would undermine these critical values
- protect the independence of health and medical research, free from political interference.

89 Labor is undertaking a strategic review of Australia's health and medical research capabilities in light of changes that have emerged over the last two decades including:

- the burden of disease in Australia has altered. Chronic diseases, including those associated with ageing, and mental health have replaced acute infectious diseases and acute vascular events as the leading causes of morbidity and mortality
- the mapping of the human genome and ICT revolution have both accelerated our acquisition of new knowledge, while increasing the resources required for that level of research
- the nature of research, whereby individuals and small groups could initiate and carry out meaningful research, has also changed and significantly larger infrastructure is now required. New and emerging technologies make it easier for larger groups to work together to achieve more meaningful outcomes
- there is a growing recognition of the importance of rapidly translating discoveries from basic research into treatment, and ensuring that those breakthroughs become clinical practice
- Australian's health sector is undergoing significant reform and it is important that our research activities align with that process.

90 The review will consider how to optimise the future environment for carrying out health and medical research in this country. It will provide a clear understanding of the current investment in the sector from both the government and the private sector, including industry, non-government organisations and philanthropy. It will look at our investment and how we can get greater buy-in and involvement from business.

Dental

91 Labor is committed to improving the delivery of dental services in Australia and working with the states and territories to reduce public dental waiting lists.

92 Dental health is important to overall general health and Labor recognises the importance of addressing the dental health needs of all Australians.

93 Labor is committed to addressing the dental health needs of all Australians. The lack of access to appropriate dental care for many disadvantaged Australians represents a significant gap in the provision of universal health care. Labor will work towards the goal of universal access to dental care, in the same way that Medicare provides access to affordable care for other health needs.

94 Labor will:

- expand training for dentists with a new foundation year for dentists to work in the public dental system
- work with experts to develop affordable and sustainable improvements to dental care in Australia that can address the lack of access and affordability of care for those who need it
- continue to support the Medicare Teen Dental Program that has seen over 1.3 million dental checkups to Australian teenagers
- support preventative dental care.

95 Labor will provide eligible teenagers with access to preventative dental health checks and will encourage young Australians to continue to look after their teeth once they become independent and move out of home.