

FUNDING OPPOSITION MENTAL HEALTH PROMISES FROM OTHER HEALTH PROGRAMS A SHORT-SIGHTED APPROACH

Plans by the Federal Opposition to boost mental health services are welcome and arguably overdue, but must not be funded at the expense of other health services and initiatives, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia says.

The Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, has revealed a Coalition Government would spend \$1.5 billion to boost front-line mental health services. This would include 80 new mental care facilities, including 60 specially tailored to meet the demands of the younger population.

National President of the PSA, Warwick Plunkett said the boost was most welcome but it must not be achieved by slashing funding for other health programs.

“eHealth is the missing link in enabling genuine collaborative primary health-care teams to work effectively and improve the wellbeing of all Australians,” Mr Plunkett said.

“Pharmacists need to be better incorporated into any mental health policy given the dependence of most sufferers on compliance with their medication regimen and the role pharmacists can cost-effectively play in achieving that outcome.”

Mr Plunkett said the Opposition had said it would fund its mental health initiatives through cuts to the bureaucracy and by a range of other measures including scrapping any extra GP super clinics and scrapping aspects of eHealth, including the very important development of eHealth records.

“PSA is particularly concerned at any suggestion that the Opposition would remove funds from eHealth to fund its promises,” Mr Plunkett said.

“The eHealth area is of particular concern. eHealth has been a long time coming and its benefits have been clearly and thoroughly canvassed and identified.

“There is demonstrable evidence that eHealth records will go a long way to reducing hospitalisations and to improving the wellbeing of all Australians.”

Mr Plunkett said that this alone was reason enough not to cut programs or reduce funding for them.

“An added incentive for the Government is that improving the health of Australians and cutting hospitalisations presents cost savings over the short and long term,” Mr Plunkett said.

“Clearly the Opposition needs to rethink its strategy on this issue. The mental health initiative is very much needed, but to implement it at the expense of eHealth is a short-sighted approach which could adversely affect the long-term viability of Australia’s health-care system.”

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MEDIA CONTACT: Warwick Plunkett 0412 304 450
Peter Waterman 0419 260 827