



A commitment to a national women's health policy

The need for a national health plan to address

- **Bulk billing**
- **Hospital waiting lists**
- **GP shortages (especially female GP's in Tasmania)**
- **Dental/Oral health**

Bulk Billing

Federal Labor is committed to supporting bulk billing.

Bulk billing has reached a record high under Labor. In March 2010, 74.5 percent of all services were bulk billed – up 0.6 of a percentage on the December quarter 2010.

Federal Labor is also introducing new bulk billing incentives to ensure that all Australians have access to essential pathology and diagnostic imaging tests.

The Gillard Labor Government has acted to protect patient access to services by introducing new bulk billing incentives for diagnostic imaging services and pathology episodes:

- The bulk billing incentive for out-of-hospital services for diagnostic imaging is an increased rebate of 10 per cent of the Medicare schedule fee; and
- For pathology, the bulk billing incentive will be between \$1.60 and \$4.00 an episode, depending on the type of test and where it is collected.

There is now a strong incentive for providers to maintain or increase bulk billing rates, providing tests at no cost to patients.

Hospitals

The Gillard Labor Government is committed to building a better health and hospitals system. Since coming to office, we have taken decisive action to take the pressure off our public hospitals and repair a decade of neglect by the former Coalition Government and Tony Abbott.

The Labor Government has secured the biggest reforms to our health system since the introduction of Medicare almost three decades ago. Our reform plan to build the National Health and Hospitals Network sees an additional \$3.5 billion investment to improve access and deliver better care in our public hospitals, including:

AUTHORISED N.MARTIN for the ALP, 5, 9 Sydney Ave. Barton ACT.

PO BOX 20429 WORLD SQUARE NSW 2002

T 61 2 9384 2222 F 61 2 9264 2271 E campaign10@alp.org.au ABN 38 318 251 221

- \$750 million to increase services in our Emergency Departments and introduce a four hour target for treatment, referral, or discharge.
- \$800 million to increase elective surgery procedures and ensure that 95 percent of Australians receive elective surgery within clinically recommended times.
- \$1.6 billion in funding for 1,316 new sub acute beds, including palliative, rehabilitation and mental health beds to take the pressure of hospitals.

This funding has already started to flow from 1 July this year.

In contrast, the Coalition has no plans for the long term, sustainable reform of our public hospitals. The Coalition is continuing on the same trajectory as they did when Tony Abbott was Health Minister; slashing a billion dollars from public hospital funding, freezing GP training numbers and not providing any leadership in this important policy area.

These commitments build on the investments the Labor Government has made over the first two years of government, including:

- Signing a new \$64 billion Health Care Agreement – an increase of 50% on the last agreement signed by the Liberal Party;
- \$600 million to improve access to elective surgery – more than 76,000 procedures have now been performed, and more than 120 hospitals have received new surgical equipment and theatre upgrades; and
- \$3.2 billion to rebuild health infrastructure, with 35 projects across the country.

GPs

The Gillard Labor Government is committed to improving access to GP and primary health care, particularly in communities around the country that struggle from GP shortages.

The Labor Government is investing \$275 million to open 36 Super Clinics. Of these 12 clinics are operating services, with construction underway at 18 sites. We are getting on with the job of delivering on this commitment.

The government has been inundated with requests and representations for more GP Super Clinics from around the country.

That's why we are investing a further \$355 million for 23 new dedicated GP Superclinics and upgrades for another 425 primary care facilities.

Mr Abbott and the Coalition want to deprive local communities of these increased health services. They have plans to cut the commitment to expand GP Superclinics and primary health infrastructure.

Dental

The Gillard Labor Government is committed to provide better health services for all Australians. For the last two and a half years we have been working to improve access to dental services.

The Labor Government established the Medicare Teen Dental Plan on 1 July 2008 and this program has already provided over 800,000 preventive dental check-ups.

The Labor Government is seeking to reintroduce the Commonwealth Dental Health program, but the Coalition has blocked this initiative three times in the Senate, denying dental treatment to some one million Australians who are most in need. The Coalition does not have a plan for the future and they are standing in the way of reform.

When in Government, the Coalition closed the Commonwealth Dental Scheme which resulted in waiting lists for dental care blowing out to some 650,000.

The dilemma of competing demands of investment in health promotion and prevention and the immediate needs of primary health service delivery –including a significant increase in funds for Hobart Women’s Health Centre in its role in health promotion and prevention in Tasmania.

Labor has made a landmark investment of \$872 million in preventative health programs to be rolled out in schools, workplaces, and local communities with a high incidence of chronic disease.

Federal Labor has also commissioned the National Preventative Health Taskforce to provide recommendations on what action can be taken in improving health promotion and prevention – starting with the priority areas of alcohol, tobacco and obesity.

As a result the Gillard Labor Government has embarked on a bold strategy for preventative health action, including:

- The world’s toughest regime on cutting smoking rates.
- Tackling binge drinking through a \$103.5 million strategy.
- Supporting ongoing preventative care for Australians living with diabetes, through a \$449.2 million reform.
- Providing approximately \$300 million for social marketing campaigns tackling tobacco, alcohol, obesity and illicit drugs;
- Helping Australians to participate more in sport and active recreation through a boost to sports funding; and

- Delivering the most ambitious study of Australia's health ever conducted.

However while governments can take significant action, there's a need for action in every community and every family. The Taskforce's proposals represent not only a call to action for our Government, but for states and territories, communities, workplaces, families and individuals.

Mental Health

The Gillard Labor Government is committed to ensuring Australia has a sustainable and effective mental health system.

As part of the National Health and Hospitals Network reforms, the Labor Government has committed \$175 million in the 2010 budget to improve our mental health system.

This includes:

- \$78 million to deliver up to 30 new Headspace sites around Australia as well as extra funding for the 30 existing Headspace sites. This will provide support for an additional 20,000 young Australians each year;
- \$58 million to deliver care packages to better support up to 25,000 people with severe mental illness;
- \$25 million to expand the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre model; and
- \$13 million to employ an additional 136 mental health nurses and provide an estimated 11,700 extra services.

One of the biggest problems in mental health is people falling through the cracks between different services. This cannot be fixed overnight, but as part of the health reform agreement, the Labor Government has also decided to take full funding and policy responsibility for primary mental health care services. This will help drive better co-ordination of community based mental health services over time.

Support for allied health professionals

The Gillard Labor Government has invested in GP Super Clinics across the country. Social workers and occupational therapists can provide valuable clinical services to support people with mental illness, as part of integrated, team based care. In the 2010-11 Budget, Federal Labor announced that it would introduce coordinated mental health care packages for people with severe mental illness in primary care and make better use of fee-for-service Medicare items.

Body image

The Gillard Labor Government will provide funding to support a significant expansion of the activities of *The Butterfly Foundation*, a national charity concerned with eating disorders and negative body image. The *Butterfly Foundation* will develop training and workshop materials that are tailored to the needs of primary and high school students. These materials will cover issues including media literacy and self esteem and will be disseminated to approximately 2,500 educators and are expected to reach more than 100,000 young people across the country.

We have also endorsed a Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct to guide media, fashion and advertising industries on this issue. The Code of Conduct was developed by the National Advisory Group on Body Image and provides a list of best practice principles to guide professionals in the media, advertising and fashion industries about body image.

Housing affordability

Federal Labor's housing policies have delivered more homes that Australian families can afford to buy and rent and has committed nearly \$20 billion to housing programs to build more affordable homes for Australian families.

The First Home Owners Boost helped more than 250,000 people into their first home during the global financial crisis.

For those who missed out on the First Home Owners Boost, they can open a First Home Saver Account – the Government makes matched contributions (to a certain value) to these Accounts, and less tax is charged on them than on other savings accounts.

Seventy six local projects have been funded under the Housing Affordability Fund - delivering savings to around 14,000 home buyers in new developments. Some 380,000 more households will benefit from planning and development reform that has brought forward new lots and made development regulation more efficient.

The Gillard Labor Government will deliver 80,000 more affordable rental homes across Australia particularly for low and moderate income earners.

Federal Labor has provided funding to build over 21,000 new social housing homes. We have also helped to repair more than 70,000 existing dwellings – 10,000 of which would have become unfit for use as housing.

In addition, Federal Labor established the National Rental Affordability Scheme to encourage the private sector to build 50,000 homes and rent them to low and moderate income earners at 20 per cent below market rate.

Homelessness

Federal Labor has a plan to reduce homelessness in Australia, with specific goals to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and provide accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020.

Federal Labor has invested \$4.9 billion in new funding to address homelessness, with an additional \$400 million from the States and Territories.

Federal Labor has:

- Increased funding to homelessness services by 55 per cent.
- Introduced weekly government support payments for people who are at risk of homelessness (payments used to be fortnightly).
- Invested \$80.4 million for Emergency Relief and financial counselling in recognition of the impact of the global economic downturn on vulnerable people.
- Delivered a \$10 million boost to the Personal Helpers and Mentors program, to give homeless Australians with a severe mental illness greater access to one-on-one support.
- Funded services with specialist skills in helping homeless people get work within Job Services Australia, Jobs Fund and Innovation Fund.

The housing supply problem has been growing for many years in Australia. The former Coalition Government played no role in housing policy while a major problem emerged - it was left in the too-hard basket. The former Government did not even have a Minister for Housing.

Violence against women

The Gillard Labor Government is committed to a zero tolerance approach to domestic violence, and is taking action to reduce its incidence.

The Gillard Labor Government is in the final stages of the development of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women. The National Plan will coordinate a national violence prevention agenda across all States and Territories and improve the services provided to women who are victims of violence.

Federal Labor has already introduced:

- A new national domestic violence and sexual assault telephone and online crisis service.
- Respectful relationships education to give young men and women the communication skills they need to establish good friendships and relationships that are based on equality and respect.
- A social marketing campaign focused on changing attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence.
- Funding to support research on perpetrator treatment and nationally consistent laws.
- Funding to enhance access to justice through increased funding for legal aid commissions, community legal centres, and Indigenous legal services, including for women facing legal problems.

- Domestic violence training for rural health workers.
- Funding for Indigenous family violence and safety programs through the *Close the Gap* Strategy.

Employment

Labor strongly believes in pay equity, based on our values of fairness and equity. Australian women still earn over 17 per cent less than men in weekly terms.

By abolishing Work Choices, Labor has got rid of industrial laws that were threatening the rights of female employees and widening the gender pay gap. By creating a decent safety net, a stronger set of minimum national employment standards, a right to collective bargaining, increased superannuation and a fairer system for minimum wage increases, we are ensuring a fairer go for women workers.

In addition, through the Fair Work Act we have extended equal remuneration provisions to include the right of employees to equal pay for work of equal or comparative value – a more generous test that allows comparisons between comparable categories of work where the female-dominated category may have been historically under-valued.

The Australian Services Union has brought the first case relying on the more generous pay equity provisions that Federal Labor introduced into the Fair Work Act.

The tribunal is independent, and in all such cases, there is uncertainty. A Gillard Labor Government will continue to play its part, assisting the tribunal and the parties by presenting accurate and comprehensive data and evidence on gender pay equity.

We believe the community sector plays a vital role in delivering services to the most vulnerable in our community and it is important it has the resources it needs to do this job. That is why the Gillard Labor Government has committed to working through the funding implications of any increase in wages awarded as a result of this case cooperatively in consultation with the affected unions and employers.

Superannuation

The Gillard Labor Government will deliver substantial improvements in retirement savings and a fairer distribution of superannuation tax concessions, ensuring hard working Australians can enjoy a more comfortable retirement.

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will increase the superannuation guarantee rate from 9 to 12 per cent. We will also extend the superannuation guarantee to workers aged between 70 and 74.

These measures will directly address issues raised by our ageing population, boost savings, and bring broader benefits to all Australians.

Around 8.4 million Australians stand to benefit from the increased superannuation guarantee and 33,000 from the increase in the superannuation guarantee age limit.

The Coalition does not support this important reform.

Working womens centres

The Gillard Labor Government is investing \$1.2 million over two years in Community Based Employment Advice Services that deliver vital workplace services and advice for our most vulnerable workers. The funding is being shared across existing services, including the Working Women's Centres in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Queensland and the Employment Law Centre of Western Australia.

These not-for-profit organisations play a valuable role in providing advice, assistance and information to people who experience difficulties in asserting and exercising their workplace rights.

The Australian Government will further develop Community Based Employment Advice Services, by working with the State Governments to:

- In future provide a more even and secure funding base for the Community Based Employment Advice Services to be based on triennial agreements.
- Explore the possibility of new centres in those states where none exist.
- Make funding more consistent across all centres.
- Establish consistency across the centres so that things like staff exchange programs, information sharing, referral protocols and access to training and support can happen.

Women - Women's Economic Security

The Gillard Labor Government has taken practical action to improve women's pay, conditions and retirement incomes through a fairer workplace relations system.

These reforms will increase women's independence and give families more choice about how they combine work and family responsibilities.

Federal Labor's reforms include:

- The Fair Work Act 2009, which puts in place practical measures to restore fairness and make it easier for women and men to make choices about how to balance paid

work and family life. The Act also helps to achieve pay equity between women and men.

- Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme. Paid Parental Leave will give babies the best start in life and will help women who want to continue their careers to keep a connection to the workforce.
- Major superannuation reform that will ensure that more Australian women have greater financial security in their retirement. These reforms will deliver a woman aged 30 an extra \$78,000 in superannuation.
- Significant reform to the pension system which has seen the maximum pension rate increased by around \$100 a fortnight for singles and around \$74 for couples combined. Around 72 percent of single age pensioners and 70 per cent of Carer Payment recipients are women.
- Significant amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act to provide greater protection from sexual harassment and extend protection from discrimination on the ground of family responsibilities to both women and men in the workforce.

Maternal health/Midwifery

All Australian women deserve access to safe, high quality maternity services. Federal Labor has introduced maternity services reforms that respond to the growing pressure on our maternity services as the number of births rise and workforce shortages worsen – by making better use of the midwifery workforce while maintaining current high standards of safety and quality.

Additional investment of \$120.5 million is improving choice and access to maternity services for pregnant women and new mothers in Australia. The package also recognises the important role played by qualified midwives in the birthing experience of many Australian women.

The package of reforms includes:

- Medicare Benefits Schedule and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) benefits for services provided by eligible midwives, to provide greater access to maternity care provided by midwives working in collaboration with doctors – expanding choice for women.
- A Government-supported professional indemnity insurance scheme for eligible midwives.
- More services for rural and remote communities, where the state of maternity services is poor, through an expansion of the successful Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program (MSOAP).
- Extra scholarships for GPs and midwives to expand the maternity workforce, particularly in rural and remote Australia.

- A new 24 hour, seven days a week telephone helpline and information service to provide women, their partners and families with greater access to maternity information and support before and after birth.

The Gillard Labor Government is also investing \$85 million in the National Perinatal Depression Plan to improve prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression and provide better support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression.

Each year around one in 10 Australian women experience depression during pregnancy and almost one in five experience depression in the weeks and months after giving birth. If left untreated, this can have a negative impact on new mothers, their families and friends.

This initiative will benefit all women who are at risk of or experience depression during pregnancy or in the first year following childbirth.

The initiative will enable provision of:

- routine screening for depression - once during pregnancy and a follow-up check at around the time the baby is two months old;
- follow-up support and care for women who had been assessed as at risk of or experiencing antenatal or postnatal depression; and
- training for health professionals to help them screen expectant and new mothers and identify those at risk of or experiencing depression.

Status of women

The Gillard Labor Government has taken practical action to improve women's pay, conditions and retirement incomes through a fairer workplace relations system.

These reforms will increase women's independence and give families more choices about how they combine work and family responsibilities.

Federal Labor's reforms include:

- The Fair Work Act 2009, which puts in place practical measures to restore fairness and make it easier for women and men to make choices about how to balance paid work and family life. The Act also helps to achieve pay equity between women and men.
- Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme by 1 January 2011. Paid Parental Leave will give babies the best start in life and will help women who want to continue their careers to keep a connection with the workforce.

- Major superannuation reform that will ensure that more Australian women have greater financial security in their retirement. These reforms will deliver a woman aged 30 an extra \$78,000 in superannuation.
- Significant reform to the pension system which has seen the maximum pension rate increased by around \$100 a fortnight for singles and around \$74 for couples combined. Around 72 percent of single age pensioners, and 70 per cent of Carer Payment recipients are women.
- Ensuring families have access to high-quality, affordable child care and early childhood education. This includes increasing the Child Care Rebate to 50 per cent and lifting the maximum threshold from \$4,300 to \$7,500.