

Morrison government promises \$1.25 billion for health care

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

With health perennially a challenging election issue for the Coalition, Scott Morrison has announced \$1.25 billion extra funding he says will provide more doctors, nurses and services.

Under a new Community Health and Hospitals Program, the federal government will partner with communities, states and territories, health and hospital services and research institutions to supply funding in four areas. They are:

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specialist hospital services such as cancer treatment, rural health and hospital infrastructure

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drug and alcohol treatment

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preventive, primary and chronic disease management

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mental health

The funding is over the forward estimates period. The government has not announced offsetting savings, but Monday's budget update will show strong revenue flows, enabling substantial money for a range of initiatives between now and the election as well as a healthy surplus next financial year.

The health program was unveiled as the federal, state and territories meet in Adelaide on Wednesday for the Council of Australian Governments with health one of the items on the agenda. Morrison dined with first ministers on Tuesday night.

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Morrison linked the extra funding to a strong economy, which “gives us the ability to continue our record investment in Medicare, hospitals, new medicines and new treatments.”

The new program would complement the government’s record investment in public hospitals, he said.

“Our funding for public hospitals will more than double from \$13.3 billion in 2012-13 to \$28.7 billion in 2024-25”, he said.

“Our new five year National Health Reform Agreement will deliver more than \$30 billion in additional public hospital funding from 2020-21 to 2024-25, taking overall funding during this period to \$130.2 billion”.

Three Liberal states and three Labor jurisdictions have signed on to the new agreement.

But the Labor states of Victoria and Queensland are in dispute with the federal government over money for hospitals. At issue is more than \$600 million that has been withheld by the Commonwealth for services said not to have been delivered.

These two states have also not signed the national school reform agreement.

COAG will also discuss drought and security issues. The Commonwealth will urge that state governments pay their bills to small business within 20 days – they are expected to agree.

One key issue at COAG will be population. Ahead of setting next year’s immigration cap – which Morrison earlier flagged will be lower than the previous 190,000 cap, that hasn’t been reached - the federal government is asking the states and territories for input.

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Morrison has asked states and territories to provide by January 31 details about:

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population carrying capacity with regional breakdowns, based on infrastructure and services provision

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projected population growth

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the contribution of the Commonwealth's migration programme to population growth, broken down into temporary and permanent migration, and by visa class - skilled, family and humanitarian

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skills that businesses will need over the next 15 years, broken down by region

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plans for employment, housing, services, infrastructure and social cohesion, over the next five, 10 and 15 years

Business groups have warned against cutting immigration.

NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian, who faces an election in March, has advocated a big cut in the number of immigrants to NSW, saying recently "It's time to tap the brakes and take a breather on immigration levels to this state. We should return to Howard-era immigration levels in NSW".

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company

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