

Money for hospital emergency departments in Shorten's campaign launch

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Bill Shorten will announce funding to upgrade hospital emergency departments and cut waiting times at Labor's Sunday campaign launch, which will be attended by three former prime ministers to highlight a theme of unity.

An ALP government would invest A\$500 million in the emergency departments, half of which comes from Labor's already announced Better Hospitals Fund.

At the Brisbane launch Shorten will emphasise the link between the tough economic decisions Labor has made and the ability provided to spend on health and other services.

He will cast the election as a choice between spending on services on the one hand versus bigger tax loopholes and cuts to services on the other.

In all, Labor says that with two weeks to go until the May 18 election, the gap between the major parties on health now totals more than \$8 billion.

Shorten will say that Labor is offering "the biggest health care plan any party has ever offered at an election".

Three of the four Labor living former prime ministers will be at the launch - Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd, and Paul Keating. The fourth, Bob Hawke, is in poor health.

Shorten on Friday flagged that his launch announcements will also include plans for further cracking down on multinational tax avoidance.

The package for emergency care and public hospitals comprises \$250 million for upgrades and \$250 million for extra doctors, nurses and health workers.

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Shorten says under the Coalition government emergency department waiting times have “blown out”.

“When he was treasurer, Scott Morrison cut \$700 million from Australia’s public hospitals.

"Now a prime minister Scott Morrison is planning to cut another \$2.8 billion from public hospitals.

"Because of Morrison's Liberal cuts our emergency departments are overcrowded and health service workers are at breaking point.

"Fewer than two thirds of urgent patients were seen on time last year.

"This means more than a million patients who presented to a public hospital emergency department in need of urgent treatment were left languishing in queues, waiting longer than clinically recommended.”

Shorten points to the Australian Medical Association's recent report that found emergency department performance in decline.

This report said that the proportion of urgent patients seen on time had fallen to 64% and the proportion of all people presenting to emergency departments seen on time had fallen to 72%.

Labor's total hospital and health package includes:

- \$2.8 billion Better Hospitals Fund, over six years, to reverse cuts, upgrade hospitals and finance MRI machines
- \$500 million for a “blitz” on hospital waiting lists for cancer patients
- \$500 million for emergency departments, including \$250 million from the Better Hospitals

Fund

- \$250 million to cut elective surgery waiting lists, also from the hospitals fund
- \$2.4 billion for pensioner dental care
- \$2.3 billion for a Medicare Cancer Plan

Apart from the Better Hospitals Fund, the health measures are over four years.

Morrison to crack down on cyber crime

The government is promising that if reelected it would bring in tougher penalties to fight predators and trolls online and protect children and the community.

The changes would include:

- increasing maximum penalties for offences including using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence from three years to five years
- introducing new "aggravated" offences and sentencing for the worst categories of crime, including aggravated offences for sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with a child outside Australia and offences involving conduct on three or more occasions or two or more people.
- bringing in new offences of providing electronic services to facilitate dealings with child abuse material, and "grooming" third parties using the post or a carriage service to procure children for sexual activity
- reintroducing a bill stalled in the Senate which includes increasing maximum penalties for a range of child sex offences

Communications Minister Mitch Fifield said major social media platforms would be held to account with new requirements for transparency reports.

"We know that technology-facilitated abuse is becoming a feature of domestic and family violence cases, and we want to ensure that platforms are taking effective action to combat this abuse but we can't do that without real data to inform our actions."

The new transparency reporting would align with work done in Britain. The government would

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work with social media platforms, app stores and internet service providers to help parents by giving them tools to make decisions about how their children use the internet. These include making available to parents the option of a filtered internet service.

Fifield said the government would also introduce a new Online Safety Act to ensure the law kept pace with technological change “and to make sure safety is embedded in the online world.”

Scott Morrison said: “online trolls have no place in Australia and I promise to bring in new laws to protect our kids and keep our communities safe.”

“No one should be subjected to vile abuse and harassment whether they are in the online or offline world.”

Morrison said the law needed to keep up with technology and “I want to ensure the courts reflect community expectations about the seriousness of online harassment, abuse and crime.”

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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