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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, press conference in Adelaide with AMA SA President Dr Michelle Atchison, SA Health Minister Stephen Wade, and Opposition leader Peter Malinauskas. Wednesday, 16 March 2022

Subject: SA Chapter of AMA Public Hospital Report Card.

OMAR KHORSHID: Thanks for joining us today. I'm here as National President of the AMA to talk health, as we come very close, of course, to the South Australian state election. I'm very pleased to be joined by the State President of the AMA, Dr Michelle Atchison. We are here to talk about public hospitals and the performance of South Australian hospitals with respect to the rest of the country. We're also here to talk about the solutions to improving the performance of our public hospitals and the health of all Australians.

Our Report Card that we are releasing the South Australian chapter of today does not paint a pretty picture when it comes to South Australian hospitals. Michelle will provide the details, but at a higher level, we are seeing declining performance both in terms of access to emergency departments if you're sick, how you get in that front door, and of course, access to elective surgery.

Performance is continuing to decline across the country, but unfortunately, South Australia continues to languish below the national average on the measures in our Report Card. Now, this will be no surprise to many South Australians who have been talking a lot about health, and we know that health is critically important to all Australians, and as we come into this election cycle both here in South Australia and nationally, we need to be having a conversation about how to make our healthcare system ready for the future.

Now, the AMA has a plan for that. We're calling it Clear the Hospital Log Jam. And that plan is about recognising the actual causes of our problems in public hospitals. It's not that emergency departments are too small, it's not that there aren't enough ambulances on the road, it is that our hospitals are jammed up from the back door to the front door. You can't get into the front door in an ambulance because the emergency department's full. The emergency department is full because the hospital beds are full and we can't get patients from emergency into the hospital. And the hospital is full because it is too small for the demand that's out there in the community.

We can't get people out of those hospital beds and into aged care and the disability system because those systems are not working properly either. So the whole system is jammed up and we need an emergency solution through funding and through reform in order to address that. So we're seeking from the Commonwealth a 50/50 funding commitment with the states. At the moment, the Commonwealth contributes around 45 per cent of the cost of running hospitals. They recognise with COVID they should be going to 50/50, they've been doing that. But we're calling for the Commonwealth to commit to 50/50 funding across the country into the future for the next health reform agreement.

One of the reasons I'm here today in South Australia is to ask both sides of politics, as they head into the election, for a commitment that if the Commonwealth is able to increase its contribution to healthcare, that the state will not decrease its to match it. Because at the end of the day, if we get more money from the Commonwealth, less from the states, then Australians' healthcare will be exactly the same as it is now, or continuing to deteriorate.

So we're asking for a commitment from both sides that if there is extra money from the Commonwealth, that the states will continue to fund health the way they need to so we can grow the system to meet the demands of Australians for healthcare. And we're joined today by our representatives from both sides, they'll be having something to say. But I can report that we have received commitments that no matter who wins the South Australian state election, that if we can get extra money out of the federal government after the federal election, that the state will continue to pull its weight when it comes to healthcare. I'm going to hand over now to Dr Michelle Atchison to give you some detail about how South Australian hospitals have been performing compared with the rest of the country. Thanks.

MICHELLE ATCHISON: Thanks, Omar. Well, it would probably come as no surprise that I'm standing here to say that our hospital systems are struggling. You know, I've stood here and spoken on radio, spoken on TV, talking about the difficulties in our hospital systems, people accessing ED, people waiting in ambulances and ramping, people being able to get out of the hospital system too, and I like how our federal office has now decided to call that the logjam because that what it certainly is.

So some of the statistics that you might be interested in. The Hospital Report Card from 2020-21 showed that if you came to the emergency department here in South Australia with a Category 3 problem, and so that would be something like a major fracture or a big bleed, you know, so something relatively serious, and you usually would have to be seen within 30 minutes. Well, at the moment, only 50 per cent of people are being seen within 30 minutes. Now, that's about 13 per cent below the national average, so we're way below the national average, and it's about 25 per cent below the best performing state. So we're nowhere near that. And that's a worry.

We have a world class health system here in South Australia and we want our public, we want to be able to access that, to be able to see the doctors and nurses that they need to see, and we want our doctors and nurses to be working in good conditions. Not where they're feeling continually pressured, continually stressed. We're already overworked with COVID. We know that COVID isn't the cause of all of the hospital logjams. But, you know, we know that COVID is contributing to that but we're seeing a really- a very serious situation here in South Australia.

One of the other measures of how our hospital system is actually functioning is about elective surgery. And again, people are waiting far too long for Category 2 elective surgery. We talk about elective surgery, but there's nothing elective about it. It's essential surgery. These are things such as a heart valve replacement. People are waiting longer now than they have over the past few years to have their Category 2 surgery and really, no one could say that that's good enough. I'll give you back to Dr Khorshid.

QUESTION: Is South Australia's performance the worst in the nation of all the states if you look at that Category 3 seeing time indicated that Michelle referred to?

OMAR KHORSHID: South Australian hospitals are performing below the national average across our measures and it depends on which measure you look at as to whether South Australia's the worst. In most cases it's not the worst, but that's nothing to be proud about because when you look at somebody who waits longer than they should for care, there's actually a human cost. We're not talking numbers here; we're talking people whose lives are affected by the conditions that are not being treated the way they should. When we have world class health system, which we do, we have really good health outcomes in Australia. We are standing in front of an amazing hospital and institution that delivers top quality healthcare- I was going to say, there's an ambulance going past.

We have amazing institutions but if you can't get in that front door, or if you're sitting at home languishing on an elective surgical waiting list, then of course, you're not getting the benefit of that health system and your health continues to deteriorate, and your ability to live a good quality life, your ability to contribute to our economy is reduced because your health isn't being looked after. And we know, we are absolutely certain, and we've learnt this through COVID, that investing in health is actually investing in economic prosperity for the country. Now, public hospital performance is a shared responsibility between the federal and state governments. We've got our state and federal AMA Presidents here with you today. But, of course, there is an election here in South Australia in just a few days and I'm very pleased to introduce the Health Minister for South Australia, Mr Stephen Wade, who's going to speak to us on his perspective on hospital performance here in South Australia.

STEPHEN WADE: Thanks, Omar. In relation to the AMA's call to have 50/50 funding for public hospitals in the national health reform agreement, the Marshall Liberal government strongly supports that call. As Health Minister, I was the Chair of the Health Minister's meeting, which actually called for that last year. So we're happy to reiterate our commitment to calling on the Commonwealth government to increase its share of investment in public hospitals. We're also happy to give today our commitment that if that increase is made by the Commonwealth government that we will maintain our effort.

In relation to the Public Hospital Report Card, we've been discussing the Category 3 ED performance. Let's be clear, under the Marshall Liberal government, we've had to deal with both the consequences of transforming health and the impact of the COVID pandemic. In relation to Category 3 ED presentations, that indicator can significantly declined- declined. Let me say that again: the Category 3 ED response time declined consistently from 2011. By the time Peter Malinauskas relinquished the Health Minister's Chair in 2018, we were the worst performing state in the nation. What this Public Health Report Card shows is that, relatively, under the Marshall Liberal government, we're improved. Now Western Australia and Tasmania are below us on that indicator. Obviously, there's a long way to go. The Marshall Liberal government knew that it would not be a four-year fix to undo the damage of transforming health. On top of that, we've had a pandemic. That relative improvement is encouraging. It spurs us on to continue to implement a range of strategies to improve our public hospitals.

We're very, very pleased with some of the success of our initiatives, particularly alternative care pathways such as the Urgent Mental Health Care Centre. We've put almost 400 additional hospital beds into the system, and I believe that we're now seeing the fruits of all that investment. We've increased our health investment by \$1.385 billion this financial year, including an additional 400 beds. Very encouraging in the four months since October

that we've seen almost a halving of the ambulance ramping in South Australia. I look forward to further declines as our initiatives have further impact.

QUESTION: Minister, we're hearing more stories of ambulance delays in getting people who are Priority 1 or Priority 2. Even though the figures were good for February, do you think it's actually getting worse now?

STEPHEN WADE: Well, in relation to ambulance ramping, we've seen every month since October, we've seen a decline in ambulance ramping. Only one of those months was elective surgery suspended. So what we're seeing in both the pre-Omicron phase, the Omicron phase, and now as we move out of the Omicron wave, a consistent improvement. I believe that we'll continue to see a benefit of the initiatives we're rolling out.

QUESTION: What do you say about this latest death of a man overnight? He waited two hours apparently for an ambulance.

STEPHEN WADE: Yeah. My sympathy certainly goes to the family and friends of the gentleman who lost his life. I think it's important to highlight that this particular patient deteriorated while they were waiting. As soon as it was upgraded to a Priority 1 case, the ambulance responded within eight minutes.

QUESTION: That's three deaths in two days though, Minister. What do you make of that?

STEPHEN WADE: It's- Any death is to be regretted. Obviously the ambulance service strives to do whatever it can to respond at an appropriate timeframe. All three cases will be reviewed to see what can be learned from the cases.

QUESTION: We're here talking about the worst report time in the nation when it comes to...

STEPHEN WADE: [Interrupts] I'm sorry, mate. I'm having trouble hearing you.

QUESTION: Sorry. We're here talking about the worst report time in the nation for our state hospitals [indistinct]. You're the Minister in charge. Surely you take some responsibility for that, and what are you doing to fix it beyond what's already been done? It does seem like the situation's getting worse.

STEPHEN WADE: Well, in terms of the next Marshall Liberal Government, we announced last Friday an agreement with the Commonwealth Government— sorry, last Thursday, an agreement with the Commonwealth Government to continue to ramp out- up the urgent mental healthcare centres. The one in Grenfell Street was the first adult mental healthcare centre in the whole of Australia. In partnership with the Commonwealth, there'll be another four urgent mental healthcare centres around both Mount Barker and the metropolitan area. Certainly, in terms of virtual care, I think we'll see a significant expansion of virtual care in the next Marshall Liberal Government. We've seen a very successful virtual care service running out of Tonsley, which is effectively avoiding the transfer to hospitals of about 70 patients a day. Initiatives like that have a real impact on both the pressure on our hospitals, and also the pressure on our ambulance services.

QUESTION: Is it difficult for you to turn up today as the Health Minister in charge, knowing that that was the report card that is, you know, going to be released?

STEPHEN WADE: The report card today shows that, on key indicators such as the category three emergency department seen on time indicator, we are seeing relative

improvement. Under the Labor Party, we were the worst in the nation. We're at least moving towards the middle of the pack.

QUESTION: Is your Government's performance on health the reason why Labor is ahead in the latest poll, looking like it's going to seize power come Saturday?

STEPHEN WADE: I think South Australians appreciate that health is a complex area, it's doubly complex in a pandemic environment. Hopefully we're coming out of the Omicron wave and we'll continue to manage to manage the COVID pandemic well. There are always issues in health; the Marshall Liberal Government continues to prioritise health. The \$1.38 billion that we've invested in health is an annual and additional investment, is the equivalent of two entertainment centre expansions. We show that we're willing to invest in health. We're giving health a priority we have right through our Government. And in relation to our election commitments, more than half of our commitments are health-related.

QUESTION: You must be worried though, looking at this poll. Do you think about it? How worried are you?

STEPHEN WADE: I don't comment on polls; I just campaign for elections. This Government has a very proud record across a whole range of domains, and we look forward to the people of South Australia making their judgement on Saturday.

OMAR KHORSHID: Thank you very much, Minister. We have with us today also the Leader of the Opposition, Peter Malinauskas, and the Health Spokesman, Chris Picton. And Peter's going to speak to us now about Labor's Health policies. Thanks.

PETER MALINAUSKAS: Thanks very much, Omar. I'm very glad to be here with the Shadow Health Minister, Chris Picton. And I thank the Minister for coming along today – a late addition, and I am glad that he had the courage to come along this morning. Because the news from this independent report card from the AMA...

QUESTION: You might need to speak up a little...

PETER MALINAUSKAS: Sure.

QUESTION: ... it's a bit hard for us to hear.

PETER MALINAUSKAS: The news, of course, from the independent report card from the AMA is not good when it comes to the performance of the South Australian Health system. And I don't think that's going to surprise any South Australians, because they are seeing, first-hand, day after day, just how the bad the health crisis is now. And I do want to take a moment just to reflect on the human face of the health crisis tragedy that is now unfolding in its worst possible form. The fact that last night in South Australia, a man- or a person in their 50s called an ambulance, he was triaged as priority two, which means that ambulance was supposed to arrive within 16 minutes. It took over two hours. Later, it was upgraded to a priority one, that patient had to wait again, and then ultimately died. So let's just say that again. Last night, 000 was called, it was triaged as a priority two case, which means that person was supposed to get an ambulance in 16 minutes. It took over two hours, and they later passed away.

That is the human tragedy of Steven Marshall's Health crisis. And it's about time that Steven Marshall stop pretending that everything's okay. And this is the most concerning question that South Australians have to confront at this election. Steven Marshall's Health

policy is more of the same – no changes to their plan, no big investments in health. I offer an alternative plan. We will not proceed with the basketball stadium. We'll invest all that money in Health with a plan to fix the ramping crisis. So South Australians have a choice at this election - they can choose the basketball stadium, or they can choose to invest that money in health, so that when South Australians call 000, there is a chance the ambulance will roll up on time.

Understand this: Stephen Wade is- and Steven Marshall are celebrating their health system. Well, let's put some facts on the table. Ambulance ramping under Stephen Wade and Steven Marshall has increased by 485 per cent. We know that ambulance response times under Stephen Wade and Steven Marshall have gone from 85 per cent on-time performance, down to 33 per cent in the first two weeks of this year. So what that means, that the first two weeks of this year, we know that when South Australians were calling 000 and it was triaged as a priority two case – that is a life-threatening emergency – only on one-in-three occasions was the ambulance rolling up on time. Now, Steven Marshall thinks that's worth applauding, in terms of their Health system performance. I fundamentally disagree.

Let's put some things in context here. State governments have core responsibilities. And one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a state government is that when someone calls 000, the emergency response arrives on time. And tragically, that is not occurring in our state at the moment, and people are losing their lives waiting for an ambulance. That is state failure at its worst.

And the proposition from Steven Marshall at this election is more of the same. They have no big Health policy. They can't even agree on how much money they're investing in Health if they're re-elected. In fact, on most accounts, Steven Marshall's got a plan to spend more money on the basketball stadium than he does on our Health system with new investment. We have a different plan, and it will be up for South Australians to decide.

But we can't, we can't keep waking up every morning and hearing about how ambulance ramping has resulted in yet another patient calling 000, the ambulance, not arriving on time, and subsequently passing away.

QUESTION: Are you politicising sad deaths of people at this time? Couldn't it be said that deaths like this could've occurred under Labor, we just didn't hear about them as much because the union wasn't as vocal in the lead-up to an election?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: Because look at the ambulance response times: facts. Look at the ramping figures: facts. Ramping has increased under this Government by 485 per cent. Ambulance response times have gone from 85 per cent on-time performance for P-two emergencies, down to 33 per cent in the first two weeks of this year. Now there is a human face to those statistics, and that human face is us waking up in the morning and hearing about yet another death for a patient calling 000, waiting for the ambulance and it- not just arriving a little bit late, but in this case, hours late.

I mean, imagine being a South Australian calling 000, you're being triaged as an emergency – that means the ambulance has to be there within 16 minutes – and they had to wait two hours. This has to end. This has to stop. And South Australians have got a choice at this election. They can choose more of the same from Steven Marshall, or we can go down a different path where the blame game on Health is not the priority, but rather a plan for the future. And that's what I'm offering.

QUESTION: How much do you read into The Advertiser poll? How realistic do you think those numbers are?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: You know, here's what we know. Opinion polls are going to do absolutely nothing to fix the ramping crisis. The only way we fix the ramping crisis is to change the Government and put a new team in charge that actually has a plan to do something about it. And the Government and Steven Marshall are criticising me and my Party for a plan to invest in more hospital capacity, which takes us to the AMA's point. Omar is exactly right. Our hospital system desperately needs more capacity, plain and simple. Everything else is tinkering around at the edges. We need more capacity. That's why my plan is for 300 additional hospital beds, 300 extra nurses, 100 extra doctors and 350 extra ambulance officers – the single biggest investment in mental health in our state in a generation.

We will see this ramping crisis perpetuate, we will see South Australians die waiting for an ambulance, if we don't put more capacity in the system. And I've got a plan for 300 additional health beds and the single-biggest investment in mental health beds in a generation.

QUESTION: Isn't this report card, though, better than one that was issued by the same organisation when you were health minister?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: I don't think any South Australian reasonably thinks that a 485 per cent increase in ambulance ramping means that the health system's got better over the last four years.

QUESTION: Dr Khorshid did say that the main problem is hospital capacity.

PETER MALINAUSKAS: Yes.

QUESTION: Your Government was responsible for building the RAH, which has constantly been criticised for not allowing for enough hospital beds in the first place. Do you take any responsibility for that?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: So let's talk about- Well, the RAH policy was taken to the 2010 election - that was 12 years ago. The Liberal Party would have South Australians cooped up in the old RAH, which is smaller than the new Royal Adelaide Hospital. Let's debunk the urban myth that the Liberal Party tried to spread(*). The new Royal Adelaide Hospital is well larger than the old Royal Adelaide Hospital by over 100 beds...

QUESTION: In terms of beds?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: ...over 100 beds, but more than that. We know that there are beds in the Royal Adelaide Hospital at the moment that aren't open. So, explain that. I mean, the Health policy of this Government has descended into lunacy. And what we can't have is more of the same. And that's the choice that's on the ballot box.

QUESTION: But isn't it...

PETER MALINAUSKAS: Opinion polls count for absolutely nothing. The only thing that matters here is getting a Government in charge that has a plan to address the ramping crisis. And there's only one party that's got that at this election.

QUESTION: But isn't it the case there were beds in the system across the state at the end of Transforming Health, than there were at the start of it?

PETER MALINAUSKAS: At the end of Transforming Health?

QUESTION: Once Transforming Health was implemented, there were less beds.

STEPHEN WADE: [Interrupts] As you know, Leila, I think Transforming Health was a mistake. And I've been honest enough to admit it. The problem with Stephen Marshall is he thinks the Health system under his stewardship is going well, even though ramping's gone up by 485 per cent under his leadership. I mean this is the point of difference here, and this is what South Australians need to have some consciousness of at this election.

Here I am, as the alternate Premier of the state, saying let's end the blame game on health and let's actually talk about the solution. Now, Stephen Marshall's policy at this election is more of the same - that's fine. His policy's for a basketball stadium, that's his prerogative. My policy is for 300 more beds and a lot more capacity in our Health system to actually start to fix the crisis.

QUESTION: When it comes to the opinion poll, Stephen Marshall seems to agree with you this morning that it's not over yet. He used the term it's not over 'til the fat lady sings. Is that an appropriate term, when tone and you know, you were criticised for allegedly calling the Government rules a bunch of girls? Is it appropriate to be using those terms in this day and age? And do both of you need to step up for [indistinct]?

STEPHEN WADE: Look, I'm not going to criticize the Premier for that turn of phrase.

QUESTION: Is that because you used the turn of phrase that might have been offensive as well?

STEPHEN WADE: No, no. I've made comments in that - in those remarks. I'm not going to criticize the Premier for that turn of phrase. And the reason why I say that is because I don't think South Australians want to debate around the sort of political correctness. I think they want to know who's got a plan for the future of our Health system. That's what's on their mind, and that's what I hope voters are thinking about at the ballot box on Saturday.

QUESTION: But could both of you do better in terms of the potential use of those terms?

STEPHEN WADE: I think all leaders need to do better. But like I said, I'm not going to criticize the Premier about political correctness. I just want the focus of this election to be on who's got a plan for the Health system to end the madness we're experiencing at the moment where people call triple zero and the ambulance doesn't roll up on time.

QUESTION: So, do you admit now that you did use that term? Did you say, you know, [indistinct]?

STEPHEN WADE: [Talks over] Well, I've been all through this, Andrea. And I do believe that it's important we focus on the core issues at this election. Just - I don't think South Australians want to see me having a debate with the Premier about, you know, a turn of phrase that he made. I think what they want to see is a debate around who's got a Health policy to fix the ramping crisis. And that's my unapologetic focus.

QUESTION: Can we ask Dr Khorshid if he thinks that what you're promising is enough to fix the log jam, or whatever it is that you're calling it?

OMAR KHORSHID: It's certainly pleasing to hear announcements from a potential alternate Government to better invest in healthcare. But we also ...

QUESTION: [Interrupts] Is it enough? Is it enough? Will it do what needs to be done? Or is it a drop in the ocean?

OMAR KHORSHID: No. Unfortunately, what is needed in healthcare is major investment and system reform - that starts with primary care. We're actually looking at how do we manage chronic diseases in the community? How do we support general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals in the community to look after people so they don't need to go to hospital? Let's invest properly in preventative health. We recommend 5 per cent of health budgets go to preventing people going into hospital. And, in fact, it's under 2 per cent.

So, there's a lot more that can be done at a system level. And of course, as I mentioned before, we need to see the Commonwealth supporting our state governments to run these hospital systems.

QUESTION: Do you think that the one set of policies from the major parties is better than the other in addressing those issues [indistinct]...?

OMAR KHORSHID: Yeah, look, I'm not here to tell South Australians how to vote. What I'm here to do is to point out where our health system is at so that South Australians are informed when they go to the ballot box, and they can make their own decisions about which party has the best Health policies. And the same will happen at the federal election. We've heard very little so far, from either side of politics, about what they're going to do to transform our health system and to properly support the health of Australians going forward. And that needs to change.

QUESTION: Taking the politics out of it, you've got both sides of politics here. Taking the politics out of it, looking at the policies, side by side - which one's better for South Australians when it comes to Health?

OMAR KHORSHID: South Australians need to make their own decisions. I am here to talk ...

QUESTION: [Interrupts] To be fair, you're an expert in this field, your average Joe is not necessarily. So, when your-

QUESTION: [Interrupts] Then, you've press conference three days before the election. Who's got the better policy on Health?

OMAR KHORSHID: I've called a press conference three days before the election because I've been finally allowed out of Western Australia by the- our great, our great leader, Mark McGowan. And that's just how the timing works.

Now, I'm really pleased to see that Health is a critical issue in this state election. And there's a message there for our national politicians - that health will be a vote changer. And if you go into a federal election without good health policies, you're going to really struggle to be elected, and to be relevant to Australians.

Now, I'm the National President of an organisation where I know that all states are struggling with their Health systems, all states are facing ambulance ramping problems. Yes, there are differences. There are differences in the performance of state governments in running their Health systems. Some are, traditionally, much worse than others. But at the end of the day, every state is facing these pressures because our population is changing, people are living with more chronic diseases, and we need to recognise that and plan for it.

We have seen very little health reform over the last few years, and the reform that we've seen has been tinkering around the edges. It's time to stop that, just to end the blame game, and to develop a proper plan for Healthcare.

QUESTION: But then, if we look at the two policies that are on offer, besides- if what's already been done wasn't enough and the Liberal's been in Government and they've now pledged a \$500 billion Health package, \$123 million of which is new money. Is that enough? Compared to the over one billion of health policies that Labor's offering? Do those promises go far enough? If they're looking at it on a face value, when you're talking about the health system needing more investment, are you saying you support Labor over what the Liberals are offering this election?

OMAR KHORSHID What I'm saying to you is that when ambulances stop parking outside hospitals instead of dropping patients off in the emergency department; when somebody who is living at home with severe pain from their arthritic hip or knee is able to access surgery within a few months instead of waiting over a year for their care; that's when we can step back and say enough was done.

Is either side committing enough to health? It's very, very hard for us to tell. But the more investment that you see pledged, the better for Healthcare. But it's not just about money, it's also about systems, it's about reform, it's about culture, it's about recognising the fact that our health system is complex. There actually a whole lot of issues where state governments have no control, they can't control our primary Healthcare system, they can't control our aged care system. And yet, that is where the demand is coming in.

So, we need actually for everyone to step up, for both levels of government to step up. For them to listen to the people, listen to their experiences as they access Healthcare, listen to doctors who are pleading for our concerns to be heard, and for that to turn into investments in Health. And investments in Health will deliver both economically and, of course, for the quality of life of all Australians.

QUESTION: So, how much of this has to then come from the Federal Government rather than state governments? Who's got the responsibility to do the reforms that you think are needed?

OMAR KHORSHID: So, we need to start working together. We heard the blame game referred to before, and it is- it has been for decades a blame game. Our system has fundamental problems that, if we don't address, will continue to plague us. And we'll be having this conversation again in 10 years' time, but with far worse statistics and with, potentially, us turning the corner. We've been improving our Health outcomes for four decades in Australia. We actually have a very successful Health system overall. But we can see these deep dark clouds on the horizon, no one is denying that, and yet there is no planning.

So, we need to work together. We need the Commonwealth to lift its commitment to public hospitals, and the AMA has called for 50/50 funding. That means \$20 billion over four years. That's a lot of money. But that's the level of investment we believe is needed to make a substantial difference.

Will it fix Healthcare? No, there will be more demand than that. But it'll be a substantial contribution. But we need to also, at the same time, work on primary care. We

need to turn our aged care facilities into health care facilities so that people can be managed there and not logged into an emergency department in the back of an ambulance with a condition that could have been managed back in the facility. If we do those things, we've got some chance of actually continuing the trajectory we're on where people get healthier and live longer lives.

QUESTION: So, your message to South Australians, three days out from a state election, is that neither Labor nor Liberal has a better Health policy than the other?

OMAR KHORSHID: My message is think about health when you are looking at your ballot paper. Assess the health policies of both sides. And when you pick which box to tick, or which number to put in the box, remember that your vote counts. You have an opportunity here to make a difference; each of us has that opportunity. It's our responsibility in a democracy, and that should be exercised.

QUESTION: If the AMA can't [indistinct] South Australians, how can they decide?

OMAR KHORSHID: The AMA is here to commentate and to inform the public. We have to work with governments in power and we have to work with oppositions. We're not here to tell you how to vote; it is not our job. We are here to talk about Health. And that's why I've come to South Australia today.

QUESTION: If I would just ask about a different topic. We— In terms of COVID restrictions mask mandates are staying in place for now. Do you think that's a sensible option under the circumstance [indistinct]?

OMAR KHORSHID: It is a sensible option to continue indoor mask mandates for the moment, and to gradually relax those restrictions as we see what actually happens in the community. There are concerns, of course, with the new BA.2 variant spreading around the country. That's expected to cause more cases. but we don't know whether that will cause more hospitalisations, more people getting sick, and we need to take that cautious approach.

So having opened up a little bit already here in South Australia, it's logical to keep those mask mandates in place until we know it's safe. And of course, you'll have the advice from the experts who are advising Government on when to go to that next step of removing the masks.

QUESTION: More broadly, having come here from WA, which has been in very different circumstances, how do you think South Australia is going in terms of IS the proper balance right from COVID management? What's your assessment of how the state's going?

OMAR KHORSHID: Well, I can tell you that, in talking about what Western Australia needed to do facing its COVID epidemic, really, for the first time, we asked government to look at South Australia, which we felt had followed a reasonable path with that balance between freedoms and maintaining economic activity, but also protecting the health of South Australians and, of course, the South Australian Healthcare system, which, like all our Healthcare systems around the country is really struggling, is on its knees most of the time, and can't cope with extra activity that COVID has brought.

So, South Australia, I think, has been a success story in terms of its management of Omicron. and I'm hoping that, in following the South Australian model, that WA will see similar success and hopefully, even better.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OMAR KHORSHID: Thank you very much everyone.

* * End * * [Text]

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