

TRANSCRIPT

Monday, 18 March 2024

Transcript: AMA President, Professor Stephen Robson, Outlet: Channel Ten

Subject: Pre-budget Health Sector Meeting

NARELDA JACOBS: Health sector leaders are meeting in Canberra today with a raft of reforms they say are needed to ease the pressure on everything from surgery wait times to GP shortages. And joining us now is AMA President, Professor Steve Robson. Professor, thanks for joining us.

Now, surgery wait times, ramping of ambulances, months to see specialists - how much better should our public health system be?

STEVE ROBSON: You're absolutely right. There are pressures across the health system, and I'm sure your viewers all have experience with long waits for doctors or long waits for planned surgery, and certainly difficulties and delays in emergency department. We brought together 50 of the peak medical bodies in the country here today in Canberra. We've already met with the Health Minister. We think Australia has got the potential to be world leading, but there's going to have to be reform, and there's going to have to be new resources put into the health system if Australians are going to get the health system they expect.

NARELDA JACOBS: Professor, is a skills shortage to blame here? How do we tackle workforce shortages?

STEVE ROBSON: Yeah, absolutely. In the wake of the pandemic, we've seen major pressures on the health workforce, not only doctors but nurses and everybody who provides healthcare. We've heard from the health workforce leadership team from the Government here today. We think that there's tremendous scope not only to train and recruit new doctors locally, but to smooth pathways for healthcare workers who've been trained overseas to work in Australia. But also to improve the productivity of each individual doctor in Australia by teaming them up with nurses, pharmacists and psychologists, lots of other people who can work as a team and really expand that productivity of every individual doctor.

NARELDA JACOBS: If we look at GPs in just a bit more detail, what's on the table to attract and retain GPs?

STEVE ROBSON: Well, the first thing- we have to acknowledge that there is a big problem, and I think we've seen that from the Government at the moment. The Government in the May budget last year have put increased funding into general practice and that was very welcome. But there's a lot more to do, and I think Australians expect access to affordable general practice. The only way it's really going to happen is to attract more trainee doctors to become general practitioners, and make sure those general practitioners who are in the workforce at the moment have plenty of capacity to expand what they're doing and the appointments they can offer to patients. That's going to take resources and that's what's on the table today.

NARELDA JACOBS: The AMA's budget submission proposes a \$1 billion commitment to create an independent national health workforce planning agency. What would this agency do?

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STEVE ROBSON: Well, Australia has essentially been a rudderless ship for a decade now. The old agency that looked after the healthcare workforce in Australia was disbanded a decade ago. And really, nobody has had oversight. And I think that's a big part of the reason we've ended up in the problems that we are, with big shortages of specialities like general practice, psychiatry and others. And also, you can't see a lot of doctors in rural Australia. It's absolutely time that the Government stepped up, create a workforce agency that can look at the healthcare needs of Australians, where they are and what care they need, and plan a workforce. If we don't do that, we're not going to get out of the mud that we're stuck in at the moment.

NARELDA JACOBS: Now to another health issue, and that's vaping. What should the Government do here? There's a talk of \$9 billion worth of taxes if they were to maintain the sale of vapes over the counter in delis. What should the Government do?

STEVE ROBSON: The Government should absolutely stamp out vaping if it possibly can in this country. And talk by people who profit from vaping - people who want to sell vapes and make money - about taxes is absolutely laughable, because the amount of money you make from taxes will be dwarfed by the health costs of dealing with the consequences of vaping. So that's a silly argument, and we should see it for what it is. We support the legislation to try to control vaping going to the Parliament, and we really hope it succeeds.

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