

TRANSCRIPT

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Transcript: AMA President Professor Steve Robson post-budget doorstep

STEVE ROBSON: I think patients and families around the country tonight will share a sense of disappointment that we have after hearing the budget delivered this evening. We know the government's made significant investment and promises around public hospital care and general practice and we've shown that seeing investment in health as an investment and not as a cost has paid off. For example, the increased rates of bulk billing in places around the country, so we know that investment pays off. We have not seen a lot of investment tonight.

We've seen some welcome things. We've seen increased rebates for patients, women who have endometriosis and chronic pain, and that's very important. It tells us that the government values women. We've also seen some modest indexation in the rebates available to patients for some pathology tests. That's a step forward after decades of a total lack of indexation.

We've also got a sense of missed opportunity tonight. We've seen significant investment in urgent care centres with really no evaluation of whether they achieve anything. We know there are general practices around the country that would benefit from the funding and probably be able to open for longer and offer the sort of services that are available through the so-called urgent care centres.

We've also had a huge, missed opportunity around the MyMedicare system. We know that rates of mental health conditions, we know that rates of chronic disease are skyrocketing around the country and there was the opportunity tonight to breathe some life into the MyMedicare system and deliver funding. That hasn't happened. We hope this is still on the government's agenda because with a mental health crisis and a large number of chronic disease, for patients that we're seeing around the country, that funding would be very, very welcomed.

We've been asking the government to consider a levy on sugary drinks. This would have huge health benefits, it's been demonstrated around the world, and would have the potential to raise as much as a billion dollars at a time when there are budget constraints, and we think that's a missed opportunity.

So, in summary tonight, we're giving our report card a B-minus on the budget for a health perspective tonight. We're hopeful that the government will reflect on this and as we move forward, will see the fact that investment in the health system is great for the country.

QUESTION: Doesn't investment in urgent care clinics take pressure off emergency departments which nationally are all suffering from [indistinct]?

STEVE ROBSON: There are some questions about whether urgent care centres deliver anything at all, and there's been no evaluation whatsoever of urgent care centres. In fact, the single most important way that you can keep people from having to attend the emergency department is by keeping them healthy in the first place, and investment in general practice is likely to deliver that more than a band-aid solution, which is what an urgent care centre really is.

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QUESTION: Steve, what do you make of those mental health supports, the new centres but also the new online support, but also the measures to try and get older people out of hospital who might be staying there long term and into other forms of care?

STEVE ROBSON: We know there are significant opportunities to relieve the pressure on hospitals by being able to find places for older people in our hospital system, and I think there's certainly acknowledgement of the mental health crisis and the effects that it's having on the country. There are certainly some welcome developments but really at the end of the day, there was a huge opportunity with MyMedicare to build in mental health care supports. That opportunity has been missed tonight but we're going to keep working with the government to try to deliver on that. Thank you very much.

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