

# TRANSCRIPT

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## Transcript: AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim, 4BC, *Breakfast with Peter Fegan*, Wednesday 11 December 2024

### Subject: Axing of Workforce Attraction Incentive Scheme

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**PETER FEGAN:** I mentioned this just after 6 o'clock and it's left me scratching my head a little bit. The state government is axing incentives for regional health workers to take up vacant roles in the bush, and I would have thought this was a good thing. The incentives are worth up to \$70,000, and they're vital for getting health workers to help service remote areas, and we need them. And the reason for the government cutting the funding, it's due to a projected overspend of \$168.5 million. It's a move which goes against everything that AMA Queensland has been calling for. And the President, Dr Nick Yim, joins me on the line. Doctor, it's always great to have your company.

**DR NICK YIM:** Good morning.

**PETER FEGAN:** Now, your initial response to this from the Health Minister when scrapping the scheme would have been: "hang on a minute, why are you doing this?" And I'm the same. I can't understand why they would scrap something that just is so positive.

**DR NICK YIM:** Yeah, absolutely. It was quite perplexing from my perspective. AMA Queensland, we worked with the previous government on attraction incentives to Queensland. We know that in Queensland, we have a workforce shortage. And that's not just doctors, that's doctors, nurses, allied health, pharmacists etc, and we're competing not just in Queensland, but with other states in Australia and also the world. One of the election promises was to get 30,000 healthcare workers by 2032. And this is one strategy, this attraction incentive, to get them here.

**PETER FEGAN:** The scheme was launched on July 1 last year by the then Palaszczuk government, because there were critical shortages of doctors and clinicians. And I'm not saying for one moment the Palaszczuk government got it right, because they had nine years previous to that where they got it wrong. But the scheme was good. It was a good legacy by Anastacia Palaszczuk. Yes, there might be a \$168.5 million overspend, but instead of the Minister just cancelling it, why doesn't he sit down with you and say, how do we fix it?

**DR NICK YIM:** Yeah, absolutely. And that's something where we will meet with the government to discuss some strategies. We have a healthcare workforce shortage. We need to recruit. We also need to train, and also we need to retain them. So we have to work out how we're going to implement this moving forward. The other thing is, there's also a review on current healthcare expenditure that might be inefficient or might be fragmenting our workforce, and where we can maybe reinvest that money into workforce.

**PETER FEGAN:** I want to ask you this, Doc, and I'm not sure if you know the answer to it, but I certainly don't - \$168.5 million is the overspend, right? And this is why the government is cutting it because they're saying we're going to overspend. My question to you is, Doc, how do we overspend that money? Because this isn't an upfront payment. This is given to those people that fulfil the requirement, isn't it?

**DR NICK YIM:** Exactly. It is a tiered approach. It's not giving that lump sum in one hit, it's something where there is a tiered approach so in one year they get a set amount and in another year a set amount. But the other big thing is those people who do go to regional and rural areas, they will reinvest into that community as well because they are delivering that healthcare service. So you have your doctors, nurses being in that region. And if they are there for three years, four years, maybe sometimes 10 years or 20 years, that is going to be great for those communities.

**PETER FEGAN:** How short is it in the bush? I mean, how much of a of an issue is this?

**DR NICK YIM:** Yeah, absolutely. Depending on where you go, obviously, I've spoken to members from Gold Coast, Mount Isa, Cairns, and they are asking for workforce. And it's not just doctors. It's like we're talking about GPs, specialists, nurses, pharmacists – it's across a whole field and, like I said earlier, it's not just Queensland, the whole world has a shortage of workforce and it takes a while to train that workforce. So that's why recruitment is paramount.

**PETER FEGAN:** My guest this morning is the President of AMA Queensland. His name is Dr Nick Yim. And we've been talking this morning about this government incentive that was left behind by the Palaszczuk government. It was about a year ago. And what it is you can get up to \$70,000 for vital workers to head out to the bush. So essentially, if nurses finish university or doctors finish university, they're given an incentive to go out to the bush. Doctor, can I ask you this - when you have a sit down and you talk to Tim Nicholls, the Health Minister, and you try and figure this mess out, because there needs to be some type of incentive - do you think there's any merit in talking to the Minister about one day implementing a compulsory two-year bush service like they do with teachers and like they used to do with the police?

**DR NICK YIM:** Those are definitely strategies to consider. We know that overseas-trained doctors come to Australia and they have what we call a 10-year moratorium. That's something where there are some benefits. But at the same time, there are some challenges as well, because obviously our healthcare system is quite different. People who are in those junior ranks, they do need that support as well. So sometimes there are benefits of having that metropolitan city support because as you can imagine, the resourcing is a little bit different in regional rural areas. So it is many strategies. There's no easy fix. But that's something that we will work with the government on.

**PETER FEGAN:** Yeah. Because I mean, you think about it this way, Doctor. If you're in university, you're finishing your last year of nursing or you're finishing your last year of medicine, or even if you're an orderly, whatever the case may be, and the government says to you, "look, you've got to go out to the bush, but we're going to give you a certain salary, we're going to give you, know, say you earn this much, we're going to give you an additional \$70,000 to live", I don't think there would be too many nurses and young doctors that wouldn't want a bit of experience out in the bush, and they get a taste of the real world. I think what can be detrimental to a doctor or a nurse at this stage is no life experience.

**DR NICK YIM:** You're spot on there. So obviously we encourage that all healthcare professionals get a broad depth of experience. And we know that people, when they are working in regional rural areas, if they do come back to the city, they have two sets of experiences, a city experience and also that regional/rural experience. And they know where it comes from, the patient, from both sides.

**PETER FEGAN:** I know if I was the head of a hospital and I had two resumes in front of me, one that said someone had done two years in the bush and one that said that didn't, I know which way I'd go.

**DR NICK YIM:** Absolutely. We know that regional/rural experience is really important, especially for decentralised states such as Queensland.

**PETER FEGAN:** Okay. So when do you meet with the Health Minister?

**DR NICK YIM:** We have regular meetings with both Queensland Health and the Minister. I'm sure that we'll be meeting in due course.

**PETER FEGAN:** Okay. Excellent. Well why don't we try and catch up probably in the new year. If I don't speak to you next week, have a fantastic Christmas. Good on you, Doc. You do a great job over there. And we appreciate everything that you do for our doctors, our nurses, and we appreciate everything you do for us as well. Good on you.

**DR NICK YIM:** Always a pleasure. Have a happy new year.

**PETER FEGAN:** Thank you. There he is, President of AMA Queensland Dr Nick Yim. He does an incredible job. All of the AMA do, and all of our nurses and doctors do an incredible job.

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