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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Radio National, *Drive with Jonathan Green*, Wednesday 15 May 2019

**Subject:** AMA overview of Federal Election health policies

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**JONATHAN GREEN:** Ahead of the election, the Australian Medical Association released a document outlining key policy recommendations, and it urged the major parties to adopt them. For the sake of patients and communities, the AMA warned those parties that they would be judged according to their response.

Well, that judgement day has arrived. To deliver same, Tony Bartone, he's the President of the Australian Medical Association. Tony, welcome.

**TONY BARTONE:** Good evening, Jonathan.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** How many of your recommendations have been adopted by the major parties?

**TONY BARTONE:** So, what we've put out today is a table listing all of our recommendations, and their various announcements and responses along the course of the journey.

What I will say, right from the outset, is that it was very pleasing to see that health began the campaign strongly in terms of the number of announcements; in terms of the detail; in terms of the breadth of funding, and it was clearly the centrepiece of a number of announcements in the first few weeks.

Not all our recommendations have obviously been taken into play at this stage. We put out an extensive list of 21 different areas where we would like to see investment or funding or initiatives taken up.

Clearly, primary care, public hospitals, the aging population, and the requirements of our private health system, and all the underpinning modalities of diagnostic imaging and pathology that are required to help inform those diagnoses, those managements; along with mental health and other prevention items, were listed. And most of them have been addressed in some degree or other.

But from our point of view, there was one issue which right along the course of the journey I did try to stress, and that was about having an overarching vision; a real clear pathway through to the next decade and beyond in terms of health care and outcomes for Australians.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** An overarching vision in Australian politics is often [laughs] a fairly big call, I guess. But it's interesting you raise that point, because health has been so central, but in particular to the Labor case in this campaign. Is your sense that things like \$2.3 billion around Medicare cancer; the dental funding for pensioners, and so forth, I mean, are they still a little bit of a hotchpotch without, as you say, that sort of sense of strategy?

**TONY BARTONE:** Well, clearly, a number of the bigger ticketed items that have been announced have been made by the Opposition in terms of the lead-up to the election day this Saturday.

But the important thing that I'm trying to get across is that, certainly, that funding, that investment is welcome and needed in those areas. We need to see how all of the various areas coordinate and integrate and fit in with one another.

We have a very efficient and a very complex health system, one that's the envy of many places in the world. But each of those parts work together like a hand in glove. If they're not funded and not improved accordingly in unison, we're going to have areas that lag behind.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** [Interrupts] How would you present that politically? That sense of an overall structure?

**TONY BARTONE:** If we look at primary care, we look at our hospital system, we look at our private health system, we look at prevention, and we look at all the modality of diagnostic framework - they all interlink with one another.

We have various parts of the system, unfortunately, such as mental health and the rural landscape, in terms of our colleagues out in rural and regional Australia who are continually suffering from a disproportionate proportion of the pie when it comes to funding the burden of disease that they have to contend with, and the access that they are so desperately in need of.

So there are areas like that that really scream out for more coordination and integration, and improvement of the journey right through the system. It's a great system - it is a complex system - and people need to be supported in their journey there into the various parts that they're currently accessing or using.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** Terrible question to ask you, Tony Bartone, but just in closing, is there a way in which, if you were health-conscious and conscious of that big picture that you're talking about, is there a way that you ought direct your vote this Saturday?

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, what we've sought to highlight is all the announcements and listed them clearly. The Australian voter has wanted a conversation about health, and that needs to be acknowledged and the candidates rewarded in terms of bringing that to the fore in the lead up to the election.

We've listed all the announcements. It's there in a table in black and white to see. And really, each will have their own perspective or their own part of the pie that's important to them.

But, as I say, when we look at the burden of health disease into the coming decade and beyond, the increase in the ageing population, the increase in the population as a whole, and as I say, the chronic and complex morbidity of disease that's increasing, we need to have a policy or a framework that reduces the burden in the long run, which identifies the problems and supports the problems in the short and medium term, and has a pathway to help improve our health outcomes, which Australians lead the world in many various measures. And we want to stay in that place.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** Tony Bartone, thank you so much for your time.

**TONY BARTONE:** Thank you.

**JONATHAN GREEN:** Tony Bartone is President of the Australian Medical Association.

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