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**BUDGET PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO
 DEFINE AND FUND LONG-TERM HEALTHCARE VISION**
AMA Pre-Budget Submission 2019-20

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the April 2 Federal Budget provides the Government with the ideal opportunity to unveil the details of its long-term vision for the Australian health system.

Dr Bartone said the Government vision for health must be based on the reality that all parts of the health system are linked, and depend on each other to meet patient and community demand effectively.

“You cannot concentrate on one or two parts of the system and neglect the others – they must all be properly resourced and funded to ensure a quality patient journey,” Dr Bartone said.

“The key to successful long-term health reform is to properly fund and invest in primary care, especially general practice.

“General practice is the beating heart of the health system, and it must be supported.”

Dr Bartone said that, with the Federal election expected in May, there is plenty of time for the Government to roll out a series of fully-funded policies designed to meet the increasing health care demands of a growing and ageing population.

“The conditions are ripe for a new round of significant and meaningful health reforms, underpinned by secure, stable, and adequate long-term funding, to ensure the best possible health outcomes for the Australian population,” Dr Bartone said.

The 2019 Budget and the election come as the Government finalises significant reviews, most notably the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review and the implementation of the review of the private health insurance (PHI) sector.

The AMA and the medical profession will watch closely to see which MBS Review recommendations become Government policy.

“It has been our view from the start that the MBS Review must not be a cost saving exercise – it needs to be a credible clinical process to produce a strong contemporary MBS,” Dr Bartone said.

“The private health insurance reforms – the Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Basic policies - are already being introduced. But we are yet to see how they will be accepted by the public and the health professions.

“At the same time, the Government will be navigating the implementation of vital public hospital funding negotiations with the States and Territories via the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes.

“The AMA is adamant that more funding is needed to ensure hospital capacity to meet rapidly growing patient demand.

“We also believe that all governments – Commonwealth, State, and Territory – need to commit their fair share, and work cooperatively to build efficiencies in the system.

“The Government, led by Health Minister Greg Hunt, has shown strong commitment to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), and we expect this ongoing commitment to be reflected in the Budget.

“The Aged Care Royal Commission will have impacts across the health system, which the next Government will have to manage.

“The key to successful health reform is keeping all the important and disparate sections of the health system linked – and the key to keeping everything working to a common goal is general practice and the local GP.”

The AMA stresses that this Budget and the imminent election policies from all parties must contain a significant, long-term funding commitment to primary health care, led by general practice.

“This will be one of the key factors by which we will judge the Budget and the election policies,” Dr Bartone said.

“The Government acknowledged the importance of general practice in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) statement in December, but the funding commitment was inadequate. More is needed.

“This AMA Pre-Budget Submission sets out a range of policies and recommendations that are practical, achievable, and affordable. They will make a difference. We urge the Government to adopt them in the Budget process.

“We have stuck mainly to the major pillars of the health system – public hospitals, the private health sector, the PBS, and primary care – in this Submission.

“We have also highlighted emerging policy priority areas such as aged care, mental health, and medical research.

“The AMA will release a broader policy agenda - encompassing Indigenous health, public health, prevention, and other issues - ahead of the election.

“Health should never be considered an expensive line item in the Budget. It is an investment in the welfare, wellbeing, and productivity of the Australian people.

“Health is the best investment that governments can make.”

The AMA Budget Submission 2019-20, released today ahead of the 1 February 2019 deadline set by Treasury, is available at https://ama.com.au/sites/default/files/budget-submission/AMA_Budget_Submission_2019_20.pdf

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