

Sunday 18 April 2010

BRUMBY CHALLENGED TO BUILD FOR GROWTH WITH NEW \$1 BILLION HEALTH FUND

Coalition calls for the dedication of gaming licence revenue to rebuild hospitals, additional beds and medical equipment.

Time for real action instead of talk to meet health needs of Victorian families

The Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition has proposed the dedication of gaming licence revenue to significantly improve facilities in the Victorian public health system with additional hospital beds, new and improved health equipment, mental health facilities and the rebuilding and upgrading of hospitals.

The Coalition has proposed the establishment of a \$1 billion *Health Infrastructure Fund* to improve the future health facilities of our state.

The Coalition has called on John Brumby to direct proceeds from the sale of electronic gaming machine (EGM) licences, conservatively estimated at \$1 billion, towards a *Health Infrastructure Fund* to start rebuilding Victoria's rundown health system.

Growth and demand into the future will place real pressure on health services and hospitals and require real action now instead of talk and empty promises.

Victoria's hospitals are in crisis and our health system is in decline. Much of this is because of John Brumby's failure to invest for the future.

We now have the unique opportunity of a financial windfall provided by the EGM licence sale. These funds should be directed into health infrastructure.

We have a unique opportunity to rebuild our health and hospital infrastructure.

John Brumby has been posturing around Australia on health, while hospital infrastructure has been allowed to run down in Victoria. If the Premier is serious about rebuilding our hospital infrastructure he will not simply try to blame the Commonwealth, he will commit the huge windfall in state funds now becoming available to the rebuilding of our hospital and health infrastructure.

Policy

In government, we will take any uncommitted proceeds of the sale of gaming licences and place them in the *Health Infrastructure Fund*.

Failing infrastructure, a chronic shortage of hospital beds and a rapidly growing and ageing population mean that health services are struggling to meet the needs of Victorian families.

As Victoria grows, so does the pressure on essential health services and our hospitals. But all we have from John Brumby is 11 years of talk and no action.

The sale of these licences is a one-off opportunity to invest in significantly upgrading health facilities and equipment – an investment which is desperately needed by Victorian families and our growing population.

Examples of the health improvements that could be funded by a \$1 billion *Health Infrastructure Fund* included:

- more than 2,500 acute hospital beds; or

- more than 5,400 sub-acute beds; or

- upgrades and rebuilding of run down and neglected regional hospitals; or

- new mental health facilities; or

- new medical equipment, dialysis units and operating theatres; or

- new ambulances and station facilities and community health services.

A *Health Infrastructure Fund* means we can start building now for the growth to come.

Public hospitals in Victoria would benefit from this fund, whether it is by way of additional beds, medical equipment, upgrades or reconstruction.

This investment in health facilities and equipment for Victorian families would mean real action and outcomes instead of just talk.

A *Health Infrastructure Fund* could allocate funds to regional and rural hospitals, community health services, mental health and dental health equipment and facilities based on demand, need, population growth and hard evidence from practitioners and experts.

The *Health Infrastructure Fund* would operate in addition to ongoing annual contributions to hospital and health infrastructure from the State Budget and funding provided by the Commonwealth Government.

In Victoria today, nearly 38,400 people are currently waiting on public lists for elective surgery, with countless more Victorians on hidden waiting lists.

Time to treatment is growing alarmingly – when Labor was elected in 1999, a patient would wait an average of 35 days for semi-urgent surgery, but today that figure has blown out to 50 days.

And according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Victoria can no longer claim to have the best-performing hospitals in Australia.

Our emergency departments are overflowing with a record number of Victorians walking out rather than waiting hours for care, we have the lowest number of hospital beds per person of any state, hospital waiting lists have been systematically manipulated and we have the highest rate of unplanned patient re-admission in the nation.

John Brumby has failed to plan for health and hospital services that are vital to cope with our needs, and he selectively hands out capital funding for health services from a pork barrel with no long-term planning for sustainable hospital resources and services.

These funds would provide a dedicated additional funding stream to rebuild and secure our hospital and health system for the future.

I call on John Brumby to take this opportunity and ensure gaming machine licence revenue is spent on much-needed health equipment and facilities.

BACKGROUND: 11 years of Labor failings – the Victorian hospital system in decline

Waiting list manipulation – the Victorian hospital system has been plagued with claims and evidence of the systematic manipulation of hospital waiting lists. Victorians can no longer trust that patients are receiving adequate or timely care – or that the real state of Victoria’s hospitals is being reported. The Royal Women’s Hospital and Latrobe Hospital have both been found to routinely manipulate patient data to meet the government’s arbitrary benchmarks even though the Health Minister ridiculed suggestions of hidden waiting lists. The Auditor-General has also found evidence of waiting list manipulation.

Soaring waiting times – waiting times in Victorian hospitals are soaring. The median waiting time for urgent emergency department patients has gone from 12 minutes to 17 minutes in just three years. Waiting times for semi-urgent patients have jumped from 26 minutes to 37 minutes over the same period. The median waiting time for semi-urgent surgery has risen from an average of 35 days to 50 days since 1999.

Overflowing emergency departments – Victorian emergency departments are overflowing and a record number of Victorians are walking out of emergency departments rather than waiting hours for care. The government

has failed to meet its own targets of admitting patients within eight hours or treating and discharging within four hours. Last year more than 2,500 patients waited on trolleys for 24 hours or longer to be treated, despite the government's target of zero.

Poor infrastructure planning – the Brumby Labor Government hands out capital funding for health services with both eyes firmly on votes. Capital funding for health services is often pork-barrelled to the community. This results in an ad-hoc process and there is little long-term planning for sustainable health services.

Lowest number of beds per capita – Victoria has the lowest number of beds per capita of all states and territories, leaving Victorians with less access to admitted care than any other state.

No longer the most efficient – for years the Victorian hospitals system has prided itself on being the most efficient system in Australia. Under the Brumby Labor Government Victoria no longer has the most efficient health system, having been overtaken by South Australia.

Highest rate of readmission – Victoria's unplanned re-admission rate has soared to the highest in the nation at 6.2 per cent in 2008, compared with 3.5 per cent in New South Wales and 3 per cent in Queensland. This figure reflects the number of patients who are often not treated adequately, or are discharged too early from hospital and have to come back for further unplanned treatment.

High occupancy rates – During the 2007-08 financial year, Victorian hospitals were running at 96 per cent capacity – the second-highest occupancy rate in Australia. This rate is far above the 85 per cent occupancy rate seen by the Auditor-General as the optimal rate.

No access to outpatient treatment – tens of thousands of people are waiting for outpatient appointments even before they are put on the elective surgery lists.

Failing ambulance response – fails to reach the government target response time for Code 1 emergencies, even though it continues to increase the target time.

Ambulances forced to wait at hospital doors – On 992 occasions in just three months last year, ambulances carrying patients were forced to 'ramp' outside hospitals, waiting to get into the emergency department. The longest wait on a ramp was 150 minutes at the Alfred Hospital.

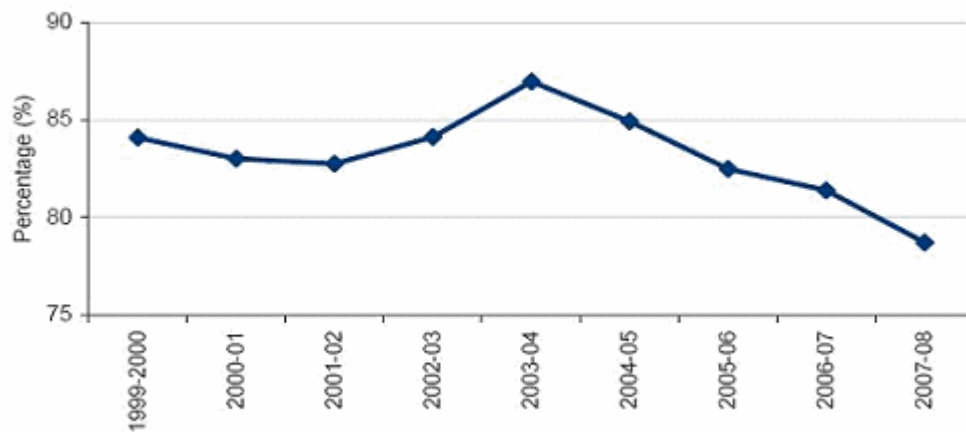
Percentage of category 2 elective surgery patients admitted within 90 days



Performance at the five Victorian hospitals with the worst access for category 2 elective surgery patients in January to June 2008.

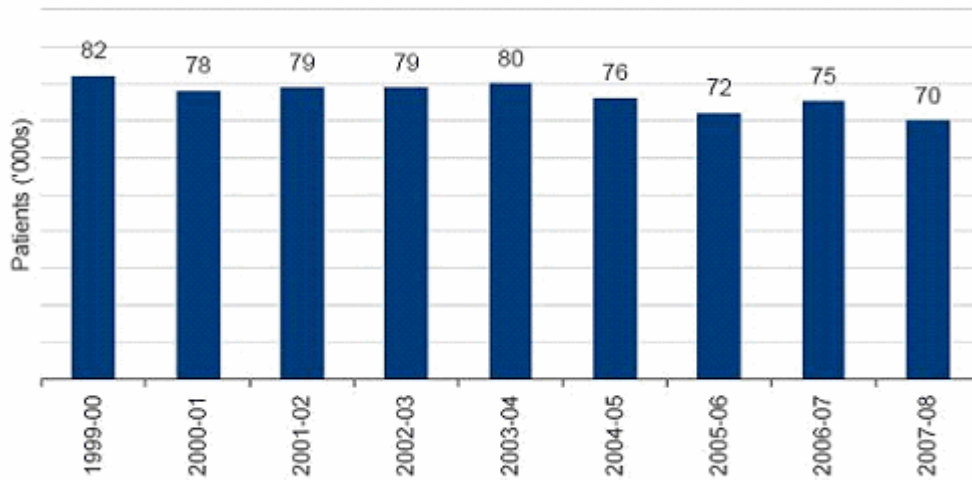
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, compiled from DHS's *Your Hospitals* reports.

Statewide performance against triage category 2, calculated as percentage



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, from DHS's *Your Hospitals* 2007-08

Statewide percentage of semi-urgent patients treated within 90 days



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, from DHS's *Your Hospitals 2007-08*

Kevin Rudd's recent Budget cut funds for Landcare by \$10.9 million, but a Liberal and Nationals Government will increase Landcare funding by \$12 million to help fund 60 Landcare co-ordinators across Victoria.

John Brumby has done nothing while Labor has slashed the number of Landcare support staff in Victoria from more than 140 in 2007-2008 to just 35 at the end of last year.

Our volunteers deserve better support to protect and restore our environment, so we will provide \$12 million over the next four years to fund up to 75 per cent of the salaries of 60 Landcare Coordinators across Victoria's 10 Catchment Management Authority areas.

These areas include Corangamite, Wimmera, West Gippsland, Port Phillip and Westernport, North-East, Mallee, North-Central, Goulburn Broken, Glenelg Hopkins and East Gippsland.

Labor has undermined small volunteer-based Landcare networks that do such great work on vital local environmental programs.

The co-ordinators who lost their jobs because of Labor's funding cuts provided expertise in project funding applications, advice on project development and support for groups in management, communication and administration.

Without Landcare co-ordinators, volunteers are battling under the burden of developing, preparing and submitting project applications and then managing the projects once they are underway.

Policy

Landcare groups that relied heavily on these co-ordinators have struggled to survive and are finding it hard to secure funding for projects that help these groups protect and restore our environment.

In the past Victoria has led the way in tackling land protection and management projects through a strong partnership between community groups and government.

John Brumby has abandoned volunteers and local councils are desperately searching their own budgets to employ Landcare co-ordinators, but the biggest loser from these cuts is the environment.

Under a Victorian Liberal Nationals Government, local communities will benefit from getting Landcare co-ordinators back on the ground to support volunteers and secure projects to protect and restore our environment.