MEDIA RELEASE

FULL IMPACT OF HEALTH CUTS EXPOSED IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The full impact of the $655 million in Abbott Government cuts to health in South Australia was revealed today to a nationwide inquiry into health.

The South Australian Government reported to the inquiry that the $655 million in cuts over the next four years could equate to:

- Removing 600 hospital beds
- Closing an entire hospital
- The cost of employing 3000 nurses; or
- Doubling elective surgery waiting times.

Mr Steve Archer, Deputy Chief Executive of the South Australian Department of Health and Ageing said that these cuts were announced with no warning or consultation by the Federal Government.

“The impacts of these cuts will be felt at the community level, particularly by the most vulnerable, and will likely have longer term adverse population health outcomes,” Mr Archer told the hearing.

“The Abbott Government changes will disproportionately disadvantage already vulnerable and marginalised members of our community. They undermine the important principle of universal access to health care that we have here in South Australia.”

Committee Chair, Senator Deborah O’Neill said it was clear the Abbott Government was not interested in listening to expert local advice on its disastrous health policies.

“These changes will result in many South Australians not accessing health services at all, or not accessing health services until their conditions become chronic and will require more expensive acute hospital treatment.”

Shadow Minister for Human Services, Doug Cameron, said the GP Tax has been roundly condemned by witnesses to the inquiry.

“The College of Emergency Medicine was scathing about suggestions public hospitals could levy their own tax to counteract this, denouncing this as a ‘crazy’ idea,” Senator Cameron said.

Mr Archer said that the Abbott Government GP Tax would devastate South Australian Emergency Departments and affect patient care - choking State hospitals with patients seeking to avoiding the tax with an extra 290,000 presentations estimated per year.

Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Senator Jan McLucas said today’s evidence confirmed that the GP Tax would only add to the strain on public hospitals and create chaos for South Australian’s who need health services.

“Witnesses today made it clear that the GP Tax will be a disaster for families and will turn people away from seeing a doctor, and instead drive them into the already overstretched public hospital emergency departments,” Senator McLucas said.

“All the evidence shows just how bad the GP Tax will be for Australia’s health system, but the Abbott Government refuses to listen.

“There is no crisis in Australia’s health system. The evidence is now clear this GP tax has been driven by Joe Hockey and Treasury with no consideration for the negative impacts. Patients will be the ones paying the price.”

The Inquiry is continuing to hear evidence in Adelaide today (Thursday), before moving to Perth on Friday.

For more information see http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Health or contact the Committee Secretariat on telephone: 02 6277 3079 or email: health.sen@aph.gov.au

THURSDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2014

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