Labor’s Plan for RURAL, REGIONAL & COASTAL HEALTH

A Foley Labor Government will deliver high-quality health and hospital services and health facilities to rural, regional and coastal communities in NSW.

NSW Labor is committed to improving health for rural and regional communities. This delivers infrastructure where it is needed and where it will be needed as well as developing plans to bolster the rural and regional health workforce.

Labor is the party that created Medicare, and stands for the right of all Australians to affordable health care, regardless of income, background or location.

More than a quarter of New South Wales residents live outside the metropolitan centres of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. In 2013, more than 19 per cent of the NSW population lived in inner regional areas, almost 6.5 per cent in outer regional and remote areas and only 0.11 per cent in very remote areas.

Rural and regional NSW is extremely diverse – from major regional centres to remote communities. Seven of the 15 Local Health Districts in NSW include rural areas – comprising coastal, mining, pastoral and farming communities.

We understand that different communities have different health needs. We recognise that the difficulties faced by rural health care providers and patients are different to those experienced in urban areas.

People living in rural areas in Australia tend to have a shorter lifespan and a higher level of illness, disease, chronic disease and injury. People in rural communities are three times more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease than their metropolitan counterparts. Rural and remote areas generally have older populations and health care is often less accessible.

When in Government, between 1995 and 2011, Labor upgraded and built 73 hospitals across rural, regional and coastal NSW.

Labor’s funding reservations for rural and regional hospitals will be out of the $1.7 billion which Labor has unlocked for health infrastructure announced as part of Labor’s plan A Better Way.

Over the last four years, the Liberals and Nationals have slashed $3 billion from the NSW health budget. This includes $2.2 billion in program and operating costs from NSW Health and a further $775 million from hospital staff budgets.

Furthermore, the Liberals and Nationals are pushing an aggressive agenda of privatisation, outsourcing and slashing services.
LABOR WILL RESERVE $300 MILLION TO SETUP A REGIONAL MULTIPURPOSE HEALTH FACILITIES PROGRAM – WITHOUT PRIVATISING ELECTRICITY.

The Multipurpose Services (MPS) Strategy will improve access to health care and aged care services in rural and regional communities.

Multipurpose Services integrate a range of health services and provide greater service coordination with innovative, integrated and flexible services.

Recommended by Infrastructure NSW, Labor will reconfigure existing facilities in order to increase efficiency and deliver best practice clinical redesign. This includes initiatives being delivered through the Regional and Rural Modernisation Program.

Later this year, the Ministry of Health would prepare a final business case for the Regional Multipurpose Health Facilities Program.

At least 11 small rural health services will be redeveloped to provide integrated health and aged care services outside hospitals. Locations include:

- Tenterfield;
- Cobar;
- Murrurundi;
- Dungog;
- Narromine;
- Canowindra;
- Blayney;
- Crookwell;
- Yass;
- Hay.

LABOR WILL RESERVE $100 MILLION TO ESTABLISH A CARE CO-LOCATION PROGRAM TO ACCELERATE THE DELIVERY OF THE NSW PRIMARY AND INTEGRATED CARE STRATEGY – WITHOUT PRIVATISING ELECTRICITY.

Primary and integrated health care provides generalist services to the community. It offers an accessible ‘one stop shop’ for more vulnerable community members to improve their health.

A typical site includes core services such as oral health, physiotherapy, podiatry, early childhood and youth health services, nursing services, mental health services and aboriginal health services.

Recently there have been widely reported concerns about the deterioration of mental health services in rural and regional NSW under the Liberal-Nationals.

At least 19 sites will be developed, redeveloped, realigned or refurbished. The locations chosen will all be responding to ageing populations and in need of an integrated community health services. Some of the locations include:

- Tibooburra;
- Wentworth;
- Dareton;
- Buronga;
- Goi Goi;
- Ocean Shores;
- Evans Head;
- Urunga;
- Nambucca Heads;
- Bonny Hills;
- Tibooburra;
- Wentworth;
- Dareton;
- Buronga;
- Goi Goi;
- Ocean Shores;
- Evans Head;
- Urunga;
- Nambucca Heads;
- Bonny Hills;
- Salamander Bay;
- Ulladulla; and
- Lithgow.
Labor’s Plan for Rural, Regional & Coastal Health

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)

A Foley Labor Government will increase funding to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) to help ease the financial burden associated with travelling for medical treatment from rural and regional NSW.

Labor understands that rural patients often have to travel significant distances to be treated by specialists, and that travel comes at a financial cost to the patient and their families.

Patients undergoing treatment for illnesses such as cancer do not need the additional stress of working out how they are going to pay for their travel and accommodation – it is an unnecessary financial and emotional burden.

IPTAAS helps people in isolated and rural areas who have to travel significant distances for specialist medical treatment such as cancer treatment. Patients must live more than 100km from the nearest treating specialist (or if the cumulative journeys to the specialist exceed 200km per week). Under the rules, the specialist treatment must not be available locally.

Currently, the fuel subsidy is paid at a rate of 19 cents/km. The accommodation subsidy for commercial accommodation is $43/night for a single room, and $60/night for a double room. If a patient stays with friends or family, they receive $20/night. Reimbursement and assistance with public transport, taxis and flights is also available.

Labor will increase funding to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodations Assistance Scheme. A Foley Labor Government will increase the fuel subsidy by 58 per cent (11 cents a kilometre) and commercial accommodation rates by approximately 39 per cent. This will bring the fuel subsidy up to 30 cents/km and the accommodation subsidy for commercial accommodation to $60/night for a single room and $83/night for a double room.

This will help alleviate some accommodation and travel costs for patients during this stressful time.

Payment will also be available in advance for concession card holders and others experiencing financial hardship. Payment will be able to be made directly to travel companies, or in the form of petrol cards based on estimated travel distances.

Patients bear the cost of travel and accommodation up front which can cause hardship for some individuals and patients who struggle to find the money and must wait a month for reimbursement. This causes further unnecessary hardship in an already difficult time.

In 2013/14 37.37 million kilometres and 120,000 nights of accommodation were claimed through IPTAAS.

Increasing the funding will deliver better health outcomes to patients in rural and remote areas, and help to ease some of the burden of medical costs. Patients should not have to turn down necessary treatment because they cannot afford it.

It will cost an estimated $17 million over the forward estimates.
MORE NURSES FOR RURAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PAEDIATRIC WARDS

A Foley Labor Government will introduce nurse-to-patient ratios into emergency departments and paediatric wards - in the first term of government.

This means NSW Labor will employ 840 new nurses - comprising 735 additional nurses in emergency departments and 105 additional nurses.

The policy will result in more nurses in emergency departments and paediatric wards in rural and regional areas to improve patient care, save lives and reduce waiting times.

This will benefit 75 emergency department and paediatric wards in hospitals across NSW.

Hospitals in rural and regional NSW which will benefit from nurse-to-patient ratios include Bega District Hospital, Kempsey Hospital, Bathurst Base Hospital, Kurri Kurri District Hospital and Singleton District Hospital.

In addition, a Foley Labor Government will legislate to enshrine nurse-to-patient ratios in law - for the first time in NSW. This will require future governments and health officials to ensure that nurse numbers are protected by law and cannot be traded away.

It is about taking the pressure off staff and patients in our State’s over-stretched emergency departments and providing more care for children in our paediatric wards across NSW.

MORE PARAMEDICS

A Labor Government – in our first term – will recruit an additional 500 paramedics and increase associated ambulance resources such as vehicles and equipment to support them and their patients.

A number of the paramedics will be based outside of Sydney. The policy includes additional ambulances, and additional defibrillators and stretchers for rural areas.

Across the State, resources are being stretched. Paramedics are working on their days off to fill gaps in rosters and working long hours of overtime in response to the growing need in NSW.

This investment in paramedics and our ambulance service will speed up response times for patients and support our dedicated paramedics.

REMOVING THE CHEMOTHERAPY CO-Payment

A Labor Government will ensure that chemotherapy is free of charge to all cancer patients in NSW public hospitals. This includes private patients in rural public hospitals.

Removing the co-payment will ease the financial burden experienced by NSW cancer patients and their families.

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Patients having outpatient chemotherapy in most NSW public hospitals pay a co-payment the first time a new chemotherapy medicine is administered. If the doctor changes any of the medicines or increases the dosage, the patient must pay a co-payment again. This also applies to take-home medication for side effects, such as nausea.

Some cancer patients pay up to $180 in co-payments for their initial chemotherapy treatment, and may even be charged more down the track if their treatment changes.

The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that the policy will remove co-payments on 130,983 chemotherapy “occasions of service” each year.

There are an estimated 33,000 “services” to private patients in rural public hospitals.

LABOR’S Pledge TO RURAL HOSPITALS

Labor’s pledge is on top of delivering all rural and regional health infrastructure projects currently underway.

Labor will continue work on existing projects currently under construction, including Kempsey District Hospital, Lismore Base Hospital redevelopments, Eurobodalla Renal Dialysis and Oncology Clinics relocation, Dubbo Hospital, Parkes Hospital, Forbes Hospital, Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, Tamworth Hospital and the South East Regional Hospital in Bega.

MUSWELLBROOK HOSPITAL

Labor will set aside $50 million to upgrade Muswellbrook Hospital.

Muswellbrook Hospital is a 46-bed hospital which provides acute care, emergency care, and maternity, surgical, paediatric, renal dialysis and chemotherapy services, for the people of the Upper Hunter.

Last year there were 7,461 presentations at Muswellbrook Hospital Emergency Department.

$20 million will go towards stage two of the hospital’s redevelopment, which will include:

- Enhanced renal dialysis service;
- Additional chemotherapy chairs;
- Additional renal dialysis chairs;
- Expanded ambulatory care facilities – redeveloping outpatient consulting spaces for medical and surgical services, along with new space for patients recovering from day surgery;
- Upgrading the lift to assist patients;
- Hospital equipment upgrade; and
- Expand the main hospital entrance and reception areas.

Importantly, this means patients will not have to travel to John Hunter Hospital for chemotherapy treatment.
In addition, Labor will commence planning for stage three of the hospital’s redevelopment. We will set aside $30 million towards this expansion which could include:

- Expanded maternity services;
- Additional adult inpatient beds;
- A central sterilising services department;
- Enhanced clinical services such as physiotherapy and pharmacy; and
- More medical consulting rooms.

Labor will ensure the people of the Upper Hunter have access to the best possible hospital.

MAITLAND HOSPITAL

A Foley Labor Government will build a new hospital in Maitland for the Lower Hunter and keep it in public hands.

Furthermore, Labor will not close Maitland Hospital – rejecting the Liberal-National Government’s announcement in early February that it would close the facility.

Under Labor, Maitland Hospital will not close. We will retain health services.

On October 30, Labor committed that it would keep the Lower Hunter - Maitland hospital as a publicly owned and operated facility.

Maitland’s population is projected to grow by 25,000 over the next 15 years and the Liberals and Nationals are planning to close a public hospital and replace it with a private one. It just doesn’t make sense, especially when Labor spent $10 million on upgrading the emergency department just before the last election.

COOMA HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Labor will set aside $5 million to upgrade the Cooma Hospital emergency department – one of the busiest emergency departments in southern NSW.

The upgrade is about planning for the future health needs and demographic changes of Cooma and the surrounding region. The emergency department is feeling the strain of growing demand.

The current emergency department has serious space constraints and no capacity to isolate patients with contagious diseases or those who need to be put in a separate area for their own and others’ safety.

BUNGENDORE AMBULANCE STATION

A Labor Government will reserve up to $5 million to build an ambulance station in Bungendore.

Bungendore is a rapidly growing town and it is now at the size that justifies an ambulance service.
A Labor Government will set aside $211 million for the overdue redevelopment of The Tweed Hospital.

This funding reservation recognises that The Tweed Hospital serves Tweed, Byron and the southern Gold Coast in Queensland. It is the main public referral hospital for these residents.

It’s one of the State’s busiest hospitals, experiencing consistently high attendances in its emergency department and long waiting lists. Last year The Tweed Hospital Emergency Department had more than 46,000 attendances.

Demand for services will only continue to rise in line with population growth and ageing. The Tweed is expected to grow by more than 2300 residents every year for the next 16 years.

Labor’s $211 million funding will deliver:

- Upgrades to the emergency department;
- Enhancement of specialist units and ward expansions with up to 140 extra beds;
- Up to 22 extra beds in the renal dialysis ward;
- Expansions to clinical services, such as the intensive care unit, cancer clinic, operating theatres, special care nursery, stroke unit, medical imaging and pharmacy;
- There will be geriatric evaluation and maintenance beds.

This in stark contrast to the Liberals and Nationals who have reluctantly promised $48 million to the hospital.

GRAFTON BASE HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT

A Labor Government will reserve $7 million for a new Ambulatory Care Facility at Grafton Base Hospital. Grafton Hospital plays a vital role in delivering health care to the residents of Clarence Valley.

Currently, there is a range of outpatient clinics at the hospital, operating out of a variety of different facilities. A number of these are in antiquated facilities which do not support contemporary practice. The physiotherapy outpatient clinic is the busiest in the hospital.

A centralised Ambulatory Care facility will house a renal dialysis unit, physiotherapy services, occupational therapy services, diabetes care, a fracture clinic, paediatrics and podiatry. The purpose-built ambulatory care facility will be approximately 1,500 square metres on the north-western section of the Grafton Base Hospital campus.

BALLINA DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Labor will respond to community concerns at Ballina District Hospital and work to ensure that the Federal Government honours its promise to provide $4.5 million to deliver a brand new operating theatre and an expansion of its medical imaging department. In addition, NSW Labor has listened to local medical staff and we will set aside an extra $2.3 million to properly complete the operating theatre.
Additionally, a Labor Government will reserve $5 million to upgrade the emergency department.

Ballina has a rapidly ageing population which is placing pressure on the existing emergency department and operating theatre, which are housed in an ageing facility with poor function. There are a range of compliance and functionality issues in the current Emergency Department, such as an undersized waiting area. Last year Ballina Hospital had around 16,000 emergency attendances.

Medical staff report that the operating theatre is smaller than two parking spaces – 25 square metres – and needs to be doubled in size to meet the national standard.

**BYRON CENTRAL HOSPITAL**

Labor will maintain the current allocation of $80 million for Byron Central Hospital and keep it in public hands. Labor will keep day surgery at the new Byron Central Hospital in public hands. We will ensure that day surgery – procedures like gynaecological, orthopaedic, colonoscopy and endoscopy will be operated by the Government.

We will not follow the Americanisation and privatisation of the health system in NSW and on the north coast by the Liberal and National Party. Labor puts patients before shareholders.

**FLUORIDATION PROGRAM**

Labor will continue to support local government and indigenous communities to introduce fluoride into their drinking water supplies through the $7.5 million Fluoridation Program.

Currently 95 per cent of the State has fluoridated water.