MEDIA RELEASE

Nurses ask - How will Australia’s health care challenges be addressed?

Given the stark reality that Australia’s population is rapidly ageing, chronic conditions are on the rise and the health workforce faces a challenging future, whichever party forms the incoming Australian Government must commit to continuing with national health care reform.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, ACN CEO, says the Minister for Health and Medical Research, the Hon Tanya Plibersek and the Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Peter Dutton must take the opportunity in today’s health debate to share their strategic visions for addressing these critical health care challenges.

“It’s time for the future of the health care system at large to feature in national health debate. The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) calls on both the Minister and Shadow Minister to move away from making ad hoc announcements and to focus on broad national health system reform. This means identifying key policy pillars for transformative change within our health system.”

According to ACN, transformative change will require substantive health workforce reform, bold moves to improve access to primary health care and an end to the current aged care lottery.

“To ease pressure on hospitals and general practice services and to secure the future health workforce, we need to build on our primary health care capacity and comprehensively reform our approach to aged care in this country,” said Thoms.

ACN calls on the incoming Government to:

- **Drive health workforce reform.** Critical nurse workforce shortages will only be significantly impacted by retention strategies. Immediate action must be taken to improve the retention of nurses entering and currently working in the health system.
- **Access to primary health care.** A health system truly centred on primary health care must provide access to the range of health professionals in the community, including nurses. Enabling greater access to the variety of health care expertise will better support health management in the community and reduce the need for unnecessary and costly hospital admissions.
- **Reform approach to aged care delivery.** It is vital that the implementation of the *Living Longer Living Better* reform agenda continue. We need to end the aged care lottery and recognise the role that registered nurses and enrolled nurses have within aged care delivery.

“There are countless nursing services, including aged care services, provided in the community outside of general practice and to assist in meeting the growing demand these services should also be better supported and expanded,” said Thoms.

According to Thoms, “making the most of our highly skilled nurse workforce will help improve accessibility, timeliness and affordability of community-based health care services. The workforce of the future needs to be flexible in order to deliver care in a wide range of models and contexts.”

ACN urges whoever forms the incoming Government to create opportunities to fully utilise the scope of practice of nurses, within all domains for health care, in order to build the health system capability required to meet increasing health care demands and to ensure safety and quality in service delivery.

**Media inquiries:**
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