



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC**

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AMA(SA) says it's time to invest in health's 'human capital'

In publicly releasing the AMA(SA)'s 2008-09 budget submission, AMA(SA) President Dr Peter Ford said that the election of the Rudd Labor government combined with a state Labor government in SA (and every other state of Australia) creates a unique opportunity for long term health planning.

'The negotiation of the next Australian Health Care Agreement (AHCA) between the Commonwealth and the states provides an opportunity for an end to the blame shifting and cost shifting,' said Dr Ford.

'Uppermost in this is the need to restore a fair split in the provision of funding to our public hospital sector – as the AMA nationally has called for. Currently the Commonwealth contribution is as low as 41%, whereas it needs to be closer to a 50/50 share. Of course, this doesn't mean the state government winding back its existing level of funding – the Commonwealth contribution must be raised. This would mean funding is available to target some of the AMA(SA)'s, and hopefully the government's, other health funding objectives.

'Chief among these is an investment in the *human capital* necessary to deliver health services to the community into the future – to guarantee the patients of tomorrow have doctors and nurses to care for and treat them.

'A start has been made, with the national number of medical graduates due to double over the period from 2004 to 2011. But where are the jobs, and where is the hospital training to turn these extra graduates into fully-fledged doctors?

'We urgently need to lift the number of intern and training places in our public hospitals. If we don't, we risk leaving new medical graduates in a medical 'Neverland' – as has happened in the UK.

'Increasing the number of medical students is just the beginning – now we need to ensure that we will have the hospital training places and quality supervision in place to ensure that the community has enough fully trained, highly skilled doctors.

'And salaries and conditions of employment must be competitive to ensure that we are able to attract and retain the doctors we need.

Dr Ford also said that with the 'Marj' not due to open until after 2016, the necessary investment and funding in other critical areas of the health system must be maintained.

'The AMA(SA)'s budget submission also highlights the need for the health budget to be indexed at the rate of 8-9% per annum, just to maintain the level of health services the community needs.

'Inadequate indexation of health funding means fewer health services for the community year on year – it's as simple, yet serious as that' said Dr Ford.

The AMA(SA) 2008-2009 State Budget Submission is available on the AMA(SA) website, www.amasa.org.au.

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