



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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

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**Time for the Commonwealth to  
'step up to the plate' on hospital funding**

AMA(SA) president Dr Peter Ford today called on the federal government to 'step up to the plate' in funding state public hospitals as crunch time approaches for the negotiation of the next Australian Health Care Agreement between the Commonwealth and the states.

Dr Ford made the comments as the federal AMA released its Public Hospital Report Card 2008 – the AMA's analysis of the public hospital system nationwide.

'The report card shows a national public hospital system under continuing pressure – a fact that would surprise no-one', said Dr Ford.

'The most glaring story of the report is the decline in the federal contribution to state health funding. In recent years, the Commonwealth government has dropped the ball on public hospital funding, leaving state governments to carry an unprecedented share of the financial burden.

'This has to change. The Australian Health Care Agreement negotiated through COAG is the opportunity and the vehicle through which to do this. Establishing the correct funding base is vital for the patients of South Australia, as is indexation, because the funding agreements will no longer be renewed each five years.

'We call on the federal government to reach an agreement with the states that redresses this funding shortfall.

'Then and only then will the state government be in a position to properly resource our public hospitals, to operate at safe levels rather than at the unsafe and inefficient levels above 85% occupancy.

'Then - and only then - will our state government be able to properly provide for growth in our public hospital bed capacity.

'The Marjorie Jackson-Nelson Hospital will be a welcome addition to our SA public hospital system, but the small number of additional beds provided for will be readily taken up by increased demand.

'The reduction in Average Length of Stay of patients is also dramatically slowing - and is in danger of stalling altogether. As the burden of chronic illness grows, and as we have more elderly patients with complex conditions, costs will increase, and this places greater demands on our public hospitals.

'More strategies to keep people out of hospital will help, but these alone will not do it. Ultimately we will need more hospital capacity and more beds', concluded Dr Ford.

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