

Chapter Ten

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Improving Health and Well-Being: A Health System that Delivers

Labor is deeply committed to universal provision of quality health care for all Australians. Universal health care is fundamental to a fair society. Just as past Labor governments built Medicare, Labor believes Medicare must be restored and extended in order to meet a range of new health care demands arising from increased rates of chronic disease and the demands of an ageing population. This will require reforms to eliminate overlaps and duplication between Commonwealth and State provision of health services and a stronger focus on prevention, healthy lifestyle and well-being. In government, Labor will give priority to improving Indigenous health, mental health and addressing the long waiting lists for dental treatment.

Principles

1. Labor believes that every individual in our society has the right to live their lives in the best possible health and to receive the best possible care when they need it.
2. In order to achieve this, Labor will:
 - put the highest priority on promoting wellness and preventing disease;
 - defend and strengthen Medicare, which is the cornerstone of Australia's health system;
 - build a better system of community and primary care;
 - defend and strengthen the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which is essential to ensuring Australians have access to pharmaceuticals at affordable prices;
 - defend and strengthen Australia's free public hospital system;
 - solve the current health and medical workforce crisis and develop the workforce we need for the future of health care;
 - improve the health status of Indigenous Australians;
 - give targeted assistance to those with special needs;
 - improve private health insurance and better integrate the private hospital sector into Australia's health system;
 - reform Australia's health system to improve its efficiency and fiscal sustainability;
 - integrate new technology into the provision of health care and better manage patient information;
 - empower users of health services;
 - improve the quality of our health care services; and
 - implement a national drugs strategy to prevent the onset of use, intervene early and minimize the harm caused by legal and illegal drugs.

Promoting Wellness, Preventing Disease: Healthy Australians, Healthy Kids

- 3.** Today many Australians become ill or die early because of preventable conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. This burden of preventable disease is often associated with lifestyle and environmental factors such as obesity, poor nutrition and lack of exercise.
- 4.** Disturbing trends in the health of Australian children mean that the burden of preventable disease may well increase in the future. Australian children are confronted with a new range of health challenges particularly increasing rates of obesity, and at the other extreme, there is an epidemic of eating disorders. There is increasing community concern in the rising prevalence of these conditions; rising rates of diabetes, childhood asthma and other allergies, a range of developmental disorders and conditions, autism, and mental health problems including depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, schizophrenia and suicide. There is also an increase in learning disabilities, aggressive behaviour and violence. Too many children and adolescents are dying from preventable causes. Over 50 per cent of the deaths of children and adolescents are due to accidents, poisonings, violence and suicides.
- 5.** Labor believes in national leadership to improve the health of Australians and particularly Australian children. This is a vital social priority but also an urgent economic priority. Australia cannot afford to compound the challenges of an ageing society and the associated changes in the dependency ratio, by having an increasing number of working age adults outside the labour force and in need of medical care because of preventable chronic and complex conditions.
- 6.** Labor believes a fundamental pillar of our health system must be health maintenance, health promotion and the prevention of illness. National responsibility for setting priorities and providing funding rests with the federal government. However, substantial change in personal behaviour and reducing the risk profile of the community can only be achieved and sustained with the active participation of all levels of government, the non-government sector, health professionals but most importantly the local community.
- 7.** To promote good health and well-being, Labor will:
 - pursue both long-term and short-term goals that will help improve our children's health and well-being and protect Australia's future prosperity;
 - pursue national strategies for ten national priority areas: obesity, mental health, cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma, injuries, suicide, diabetes, arthritis and sexually transmitted and blood-borne diseases;
 - seek to further integrate health promotion and preventive health activities with Medicare and general practice;
 - undertake new health education programs, including programs targeted at Indigenous Australians and Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds, to increase awareness of health risks, promote a healthier lifestyle and reduce the toll of preventable ill health;
 - support research into the causes of preventable health problems in order to develop new effective health promotion programs;
 - reduce the risk of communicable diseases through the vigorous promotion of universal childhood immunisation and improving the Communicable Diseases Network in a cooperative program with the State and Territory health departments and infectious diseases specialists;

- seek to prevent the onset of use, intervene early and reduce smoking, alcohol abuse and drug use including the misuse of pharmaceuticals; and
- develop new programs to tackle the environmental causes of ill health and issues of occupational health and safety.

Medicare

- 8.** Medicare is the cornerstone of Australia's high quality health system. Medicare is a universal system of health insurance funded through a combination of general taxation and a Medicare levy based on ability to pay. Since 1984, it has ensured that all Australians have been entitled to free hospital care and bulk billed or rebated medical services. Before Medicare, Australians had to rely on private health insurance or pay their own medical bills.
- 9.** Labor believes that Medicare should be retained, defended and strengthened. Labor is opposed to allowing individuals to opt out of Medicare and is opposed to the direct or indirect means testing of Medicare and bulk billing. Medicare should remain a universal system for all Australians. Labor is opposed to the creation of a two-tiered health system in which Medicare is reduced to being a second class 'safety net'.
- 10.** Labor will strengthen Medicare to meet future challenges including:
 - ensuring all Australians have fair access to Medicare and to bulk billed GP and specialist services;
 - making the promotion of wellness and the prevention of disease a focus of Medicare;
 - achieving better continuity of care for patients and better integration between Medicare services, acute care and aged care;
 - developing a more flexible Medicare to enable access to genuine multi-disciplinary care delivered by the health care teams of the future; and
 - ensuring better access to Medicare after hours and for those in residential aged care.

Reform, Efficiency and Fiscal Sustainability

- 11.** International experience demonstrates that public purchasing of health services, as occurs under Medicare, is the most effective system for controlling costs and achieving fair access to services.
- 12.** Labor will ensure that health resources are used efficiently and that priorities are set on the basis of the needs of patients and achieving the best health outcomes. In recent years the Commonwealth share of funding in the Australian Health Care Agreements has been inadequate and service standards have fallen because of under-funding.
- 13.** Labor's policies are based on the expectation that Australia's health expenditure will continue to increase as the population increases and ages. According to the Productivity Commission, ageing and medical technologies are the key drivers of costs and expenditure on health. While this increase in expenditure can be partly met within a growing and increasingly productive economy, reforms within the health sector, in the context of a broader program of micro-economic reforms, will also be required to address growing costs in the health sector.
- 14.** The financing arrangements for Australia's health system need to be simplified. Labor will:
 - resolve confusion over multiple funding sources and disputes between the Commonwealth, States and Territories over who is responsible for delivering particular services;
 - ensure the public and private sectors work to complement each other;

- carefully manage factors which influence demand and supply for health services; and
 - maintain pressure to ensure Medicare buys health services wisely, particularly in high technology areas such as pathology, radiology and medical devices.
- 15.** An effective health system depends upon effective arrangements between federal, State, Territory and local governments on planning, funding, monitoring and delivering health services.
- The federal government has a national leadership role, particularly in public health, Indigenous health and health promotion.
 - The federal government has primary responsibility for national health policy and health insurance, both Medicare and private health insurance.
 - State and Territory governments have primary responsibility for service delivery and administration and an important priority setting role.
 - Local governments have responsibilities for developing and maintaining the physical and social environments of local communities, and in service delivery.
- 16.** Australia's health system needs reform aimed at:
- developing a long-term, primary health care strategy;
 - specifying mechanisms to close the gaps between primary care, acute care, rehabilitative care and aged care;
 - improving quality and quality assurance;
 - defining the best way for the private sector and the public system to complement each other;
 - embracing preventative health care; and
 - the promotion of healthier lifestyles and implementing strategies for addressing critical health workforce shortages. Reform is also needed to clarify the funding and delivery roles played by federal, State, Territory and local governments to ensure efficiency, quality and integration of services.

Better Primary and Community Care

- 17.** Labor recognises the importance of high quality, primary health care services and the need for general practitioners, nurses, community pharmacists and a wide range of allied health professionals to work together in providing these services. Labor is committed to the improvement of primary health care through:
- reducing financial barriers which prevent people from accessing primary health care services provided by general practitioners by increasing the value of the rebate for bulk billed services and providing financial incentives for GPs to bulk bill more of their patients;
 - addressing workforce shortages by making more GPs and other primary care professionals available, particularly in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas of need;
 - strengthening the link between patients and their GPs, pharmacists and other health professionals to improve the management of chronic illness and to encourage GPs to act as advocates for their patients when they require hospital treatment;
 - promoting Divisions of General Practice, as the basis for the development of innovative approaches to primary care and the building of better links between GPs and other health and medical professionals;
 - facilitating the development of multi-disciplinary care by primary health care teams;

- providing new funding for high quality general practices to deliver services for which fee-for-service payment is inappropriate, especially health promotion and illness prevention, and supporting general practice with better resources and a reduction in 'red tape';
- maintaining opposition to compulsory co-payments; and
- continuing to develop the National Health Call Centre, with strong links to primary health care providers.

Continuity of Care

- 18.** Labor recognises that improving the continuity and coordination of care, especially for Australians with complex and ongoing care needs, is a high priority in health care reform and will require a concerted effort at all levels, including cooperation between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and local government. Labor does not support US style managed care programs driven by financial rather than clinical outcomes.

Community Health

- 19.** Labor will put an emphasis on community health programs to ensure all groups in the community have information and access to services appropriate to their health needs. These programs will be delivered by health professionals, community health centres and, where appropriate, through the general media.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Better Access to Medicines

- 20.** Labor believes that a sustainable Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is essential to the success of Medicare and that the PBS must be managed responsibly, having regard to the ageing of the Australian population and the incredible advances in the development of innovative pharmaceuticals. Labor will ensure all Australians have affordable access to their essential medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). In particular Labor will:
- ensure thorough and timely evaluation of new medicines before their approval for use in Australia;
 - work to reduce the harm caused by the misuse of pharmaceuticals, through inadvertent misuse of prescription drugs or fraudulent abuse of the PBS;
 - support the continuing growth of the Australian pharmaceutical industry and recognise its potential to generate jobs and exports for Australia;
 - maintain the ban on direct advertising of prescription medicines;
 - seek to prevent the illegal sale of registered and non-registered pharmaceuticals through the internet; and
 - ensure that international trade agreements and other treaties do not compromise the effectiveness of the PBS.

Community Pharmacies

- 21.** Labor is committed to the maintenance of a competitive, community pharmacy sector in Australia to deliver high quality health products and information at a community level. Labor supports an expansion of the range of services to be provided through community pharmacies including the delivery of basic health services such as methadone, wound management and asthma and diabetes management programs.

Complementary Medicine

- 22.** Labor recognises and understands that many Australians value alternative health treatments and products. Labor will review the current regulatory regime to ensure that it is both robust and effective. Labor will work to establish appropriate registration and accreditation for practitioners and their products to ensure that the beneficial work of practitioners in these areas is recognised and also to ensure that consumers are well informed and protected from physical or mental harm or financial exploitation.

Medical Technology

- 23.** Labor will introduce a national system, comparable to the cost and clinical assessment system used by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, for the assessment of all new diagnostic technologies and medical devices.

Acute Care: a Hospital System that Works

Public Hospitals - Resources

- 24.** Labor is committed to giving the highest priority to maintaining and improving a high quality, integrated, free public hospital system accessible to all Australians on the basis of clinical need.
- 25.** Labor believes that governments at the Commonwealth, State and Territory level must substantially increase their efforts to overcome difficulties with access to public hospitals, and to provide for increasing demand due to the ageing of the population and new medical technologies.

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Emergency Departments

- 26.** There is a strong community demand to end the long queues in emergency departments. In the next health agreements, Labor will work with the States and Territories to solve this problem and integrate low-level emergency treatment services with primary care services available through Medicare and to develop standards to substantially reduce delays in treatment and admission. Labor will take the pressure off emergency departments by improving access to bulk billed GP services and providing co-located primary health care facilities.

Access Block

- 27.** There is also strong community demand to ensure that frail aged people who need residential aged care places or some form of rehabilitative care are not left stranded in acute public hospital beds. This is both cruel for frail elderly Australians and contributes to elective surgery waiting lists and long waiting times for admissions from emergency departments. In the next health care agreements, Labor will work with the States and Territories to solve this problem through a better approach to aged care and step down care.

Privatisation

- 28.** Labor opposes the privatisation of public hospitals on the grounds that Australian and overseas experience has shown that privatisation:
- does not lead to increased efficiency or effectiveness in the delivery of health services;
 - opens the way for private operators to allow financial incentives to influence admission, treatment and hospital discharge patterns;
 - results in a loss of flexibility in the delivery of services and thereby increases the potential for additional costs;

- results in governments relinquishing the traditional democratic measures of accountability and replacing them with contractual accountability;
- can lead to a reduction of services offered and selective treatment of patients;
- reduces government control over the quality of services, leading to poorer quality of patient care; and
- involves a number of inherent risks associated with the contract, including nonperformance of contractual requirements, a change in operator ownership, insolvency, and litigation between government and the operator.

The Health Workforce of the Future

- 29.** Labor will ensure that Australia educates and trains enough members of the health workforce to meet Australia's needs. Labor does not believe that Australia should be in a position where its health system would fail without the recruitment of high numbers of overseas trained doctors and nurses. Labor also objects to stripping other countries, particularly developing countries, of their health workforce to meet Australia's needs.
- 30.** Labor will ensure an appropriate supply and distribution of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists and other health workers with particular emphasis on:
- improving the supply of all health professionals in rural, regional and outer suburban Australia;
 - improving recruitment and retention of nurses and other health professionals, through professional opportunities which develop and enhance decision making and team care roles;
 - supporting evolving new professional roles in health care professions that better meet the health needs of Australians;
 - ensuring the number of health and medical specialists meet Australia's health needs; and
 - increasing the numbers of Indigenous Australians at all levels of the health workforce.
- 31.** Labor recognises the particular problems experienced by the mental health workforce and believes renewed focus is needed on supporting, expanding and developing the mental health workforce across the spectrum including:
- increasing the number of postgraduate university positions for mental health nurses and supporting the reform of nursing education to provide for postgraduate psychiatric nursing courses and a greater emphasis on mental health training in undergraduate nursing courses;
 - Consider establishing a pilot mental health major in the nursing undergraduate degree. This pilot would be established in rural and metropolitan areas;
 - renewing efforts to improve the retention of mental health staff in the public sector;
 - improving mental health content of allied health undergraduate courses;
 - supporting and encouraging multi-disciplinary teamwork;
 - extending new staff models in mental health care throughout Australia; and
 - working towards an increase in and a better geographical distribution of private psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals.
- 32.** Labor will also address workforce issues related to safety and quality including:
- ending the practice of excessive working hours for all health professionals;
 - ensuring that a full range of supervised training opportunities are available to graduate doctors and that graduate doctors are not used to fill roles they are not trained for;

- establishing programs to ensure all health workers remain up to date with the latest health advances and technologies; and
- ensuring an appropriate role for the private sector health providers in training, without disadvantaging the public health system.

Indigenous Australians - the Greatest Health Inequality

- 33.** Labor acknowledges that the greatest and most distressing example of health inequality in this nation is the health status of Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians have unacceptably poor health, suffer a high burden of illness, die at a younger age than their non-Indigenous counterparts and too often do not have access to adequate health services.
- 34.** Labor recognises that addressing the health status of Indigenous Australians requires a comprehensive approach looking beyond a focus on health services to include cultural well-being and connection to the land, education, environmental health and employment and training opportunities. Labor recognises as essential, the need for the Commonwealth government to work with State and Territory and local governments to address environmental health issues including housing, water, sewerage and roads.
- 35.** Labor recognises the critical importance of community control and direct involvement in planning and delivery of services to the success of health services for Indigenous Australians. It is critical that we train Indigenous health workers and vastly increase the number of Indigenous health professionals.
- 36.** Labor is committed to reducing the burden of premature death and disease on Australia's Indigenous communities, aiming for equity in health status and life expectancy. This will require:
- financial commitment;
 - commitment to changing the way health services are delivered; and
 - most importantly, an overall approach to improve the employment, education and social circumstances that lie at the root of Indigenous health problems.
- 37.** Labor supports the Council of Australian Governments driving new approaches to regional service delivery for Indigenous communities, free from the usual constraints imposed by the involvement of different levels of government and different portfolios. Such new approaches need to be developed in partnership with Indigenous communities.
- 38.** In particular, Labor will adhere to the principle of providing grant funding to State and Territory health departments and Indigenous controlled health services, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to fund comprehensive primary health care services for Indigenous people. The grants will be based on national per capita average Medicare and PBS usage and adjusted to reflect actual Indigenous health needs in each region, with loadings for factors including disease burden and morbidity rates, hospitalisation rates, labour and capital costs, remoteness and cultural needs.
- 39.** To improve health outcomes, it will be necessary to increase health spending, with an emphasis on provision of primary health care and early intervention in remote, rural and urban communities. Special programs that are integrated into the primary health care planning and service delivery are needed to tackle particular problems such as renal failure, low birth weights and eye and skin diseases. Labor believes that primary health care programs must be properly funded and developed in consultation with Indigenous communities. Labor recognises the pivotal role played by Indigenous health workers and supports achieving a national system of skills recognition and the creation of career paths.

Targeting Special Needs

- 40.** Labor understands that poor health is associated with poverty and disadvantage. Special approaches are needed to maximise the wellness of those sections of society that bear the greatest burden of disease and to overcome these health inequalities. Labor also understands that to maximise wellness special approaches to different parts of our community are required.

Rural and Regional Health

- 41.** Labor also understands that poorer health status is associated with living in rural and remote areas and Labor is committed to improving the access to vital health care services for Australians living in these areas.
- 42.** Labor recognises that the health status of rural communities is directly related to the economic prosperity and opportunities of each community. Depressed economic conditions lead to poorer health and, in turn, place greater strain on the rural health services provided. Labor's commitments to rural health are therefore part of a wider regional and rural policy that aims to restore the economic health of rural, regional and remote Australia.
- 43.** A concerted and sustained commitment by all levels of government towards working cooperatively and committing increased resources to rural health is a necessary first step. Labor will foster a collaborative environment between service providers and will increase resources to rural health services. Labor will create flexible funding arrangements that respond to a community's needs and accommodate the different models of health services available and promote greater collaboration and cooperation between public and private health services, to enable the sharing of resources and maximise access to health expertise in rural and regional centres.
- 44.** Rural health care providers are facing increasing financial, social and professional pressures in their efforts to provide health care for rural Australians. Labor recognises the special demands of rural health care and will:
- address workforce shortages in rural, regional and remote areas by making GP training places more available;
 - provide greater education and professional support to rural doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals to reduce the pressure they are currently experiencing;
 - adopt a new approach to rural workforce education and training which acknowledges that the models of health care delivery in rural and remote areas are often quite different from metropolitan health services;
 - support programs that improve access to locum services for rural doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals;
 - support incentive packages that are effective in encouraging doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other crucial health professionals to relocate and remain in rural and remote communities;
 - promote cross-cultural training programs for rural health care workers to ensure Indigenous Australians are appropriately cared for in mainstream health services;
 - ensure equitable access to health services through the provision of public facilities in community health, aged care and multi-purpose services; and
 - in rural and regional communities, where public hospital facilities are either inadequate or non-existent, ensure that MBS funding is appropriate for the type of services needed in rural areas, such as nurse practitioners.

- 45.** Rural Australians suffer from asthma, diabetes, suicide, road accidents, injuries and coronary heart disease at significantly higher rates than their metropolitan counterparts. To address this inequity and to encourage greater emphasis on prevention, Labor will have specific rural health promotion campaigns that target these preventable health problems.
- 46.** Access to mental health services is difficult for rural and remote Australians. Labor is committed to developing innovative strategies to improve mental health treatment in rural communities. In particular Labor will work with State and Territory governments to develop and implement strategies to improve the availability of mental health professionals in the public mental health system. Specific efforts will also be directed at reducing the rate of youth suicides in rural communities, especially among young males.

Tele-health

- 47.** Labor will significantly expand access and improve decision making processes for patients and health professionals through the encouragement of new technologies. The potential applications for tele-health in rural areas are significant, particularly as a means of reducing the level of professional isolation experienced by rural and remote health workers. Labor will provide resources to significantly expand tele-health services. These new technologies will be used to complement the delivery of face-to-face services in rural areas rather than replace them.

Mental Health

- 48.** Mental health is a major health issue and mental health disorders are one of the leading causes of disability in the Australian community. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability burden in Australia, accounting for an estimated 27 per cent of the total years lost due to disability. However, less than 40 per cent seek and receive treatment and only seven per cent of health funding is directed to mental health.
- 49.** Ensuring human rights will underpin Labor's approach to mental health, with access to programs and services provided in the least restrictive environment, free of stigma and discrimination. Failure to address these problems will lead to a growing social and economic cost to the Australian community.
- 50.** Labor understands that mental health and well-being can only be achieved by activities across a spectrum and will develop programs in health promotion and prevention, as well as treatment, recovery and disability services. Labor will work towards ensuring the right programs and treatment are delivered at the right time in the right place.
- 51.** Labor's National Mental Health Strategy will recognise the particular importance of integrated, inclusive, community-based housing, employment and whole-of-health social services.
- 52.** Labor affirms the key role of the Commonwealth in leading and promoting reform of Australia's mental health service system. Labor will work in partnership with the States and Territories to:
 - improve the quality and diversity of mental health services through the promotion of best practice, systematic program evaluation, accountability, encouragement of innovation and improved linkages between research and practice;
 - re-invigorate the National Mental Health reform agenda, including ensuring the availability of community-oriented mental health care, provided through comprehensive local mental health services and improving access to public mental health services by targeting

programs that provide early intervention, housing, employment, improved mental health responses in emergency departments and assistance for young people with drug and alcohol and mental health problems;

- understand, uphold and promote the role of consumers' perspectives in mental health;
- ensure that Australians with mental health problems and their families can access disability support, housing, income security and employment programs and are treated fairly in the justice system and that these and all relevant government services recognise the episodic nature of mental illness and associated disabilities;
- pay particular attention to housing through a range of approaches which provide accessible, long-term and affordable, supportive and inclusive facilities, including models with 24 hour staffing support;
- recognise the particular importance of employment programs for people with mental illness and ensure new programs that work collaboratively with the public mental health system are developed to meet their particular needs;
- improve public access to private psychiatry by providing incentives to private psychiatrists willing to work in collaboration with public mental health services, particularly to encourage case planning;
- review how Medicare could assist general practitioners get better access to specialist psychiatric consultation and treatment for their patients;
- further improve access to psychology and allied health services, especially for people on low incomes and for those who live in outer metropolitan suburbs and rural and regional Australia where access to psychology and allied health services are limited;
- support the expanded provision of primary mental health care, including counselling and social support, in recognition of the increasing number of Australians with depression and anxiety;
- provide whole-of-family support services, including counselling, support, education and information;
- ensure that culturally appropriate mental health services are available to Indigenous Australians and to migrants and refugees, especially within the first two years of settlement;
- ensure the promotion of mental health is given priority within health promotion campaigns aimed at the general community; and
- ensure primary mental health is integrated into the National Health Call Centre.

Labor will ensure that the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments work together to coordinate mental health initiatives to maximise positive outcomes for the community and minimise duplication, including in relation to:

- COAG initiatives such as respite care and the personal helpers and mentors program;
- State funded services such as Emergency Departments' mental health services; and
- Youth mental health initiatives such as 'headspace'.

Labor accepts that as a matter of principle:

- dental health is an essential component of general health and well-being; and
- failure to maintain good dental health leads to upwards pressure on general health costs down the track.

The Commonwealth Dental Health Program was abolished in 1996. This has had disastrous health effects for many in the community, particularly low income and disadvantaged Australians.

The Commonwealth must accept its responsibilities for dental health by ensuring fair and affordable access to essential dental services. Labor is committed to improving access to dental services and, in particular, restoring access to dental services for Australians on low incomes by:

- Re-establishing a Commonwealth dental scheme;
- Addressing shortages in the dental health workforce;
- Providing more training places at universities so more Australians can train as dentists;
- Working with the States and Territories to reduce waiting lists and implement preventive dental health programs; and
- Working with relevant stakeholders to keep treatment affordable.

People with Disabilities

53. Labor recognises that preventive health measures and early intervention programs can improve the level of ability of, and quality of life for, many people with disabilities. Services for people with disabilities are provided by various levels of government often leading to confusion, difficulty in accessing services and gaps in services for families and individuals. Labor supports the trialling of innovative approaches to the financing and delivery of services and aids for people with disabilities and their carers. Labor recognises that people with disabilities have limited housing options and that many young people live in aged care facilities due to the lack of more appropriate accommodation options. Labor recognises that many young people with disabilities who are living in nursing homes are at risk of social isolation, depression and in some cases compromised care and could be more appropriately cared for elsewhere. Labor will develop strategies to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy opportunities for appropriate, accessible and affordable housing.

People with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C

54. Labor will actively pursue national strategies to combat transmissible blood diseases including HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. These strategies will include targeted prevention campaigns, continued access to treatments through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and health programs for people living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

Women's Health

55. Labor will develop a national policy on women's health that will encourage specific health services for women and will actively promote participation of women in health decision making and management. Labor will:

- Extend the national screening programs for breast cancer, cervical cancer and ovarian cancer to improve access for those groups not using these screening programs, especially those in rural areas and non-English speaking and Indigenous women;
- Acknowledge the over-representation of young women with eating disorders and body image related mental health issues. Labor will develop strategies to prevent and reduce the damage being caused by the increased sexualisation of young women in all media;
- Develop and implement targeted public education campaigns, specifically for women dealing with drug, alcohol and associated violence issues; and,
- Commit to ensuring targeted health and well-being support for women subjected to family and sexual violence.

Men's Health

- 56.** Labor will put resources into a national education program to raise men's awareness of a range of preventable health problems that disproportionately affect men and which result in generally poorer health outcomes for Australian men. These include heart disease, suicide, lung cancer, prostate cancer and road accidents.

Reproductive Health

- 57.** Labor will:
- provide universal access to fertility advice and control programs and advice on the safe use of contraceptives;
 - fund research into the prevention of infertility and fertility control and ensures that access to assisted reproductive technology programs is not determined by economic circumstances;
 - ensure that a representative body exists to advise governments and the community on monitoring, regulation and legislation related to reproductive technology, including cloning; and
 - enforce a ban on the cloning of human beings.

Maternal and Child Health Services

- 58.** Labor will work with State and Territory governments to improve the delivery of maternal and child health services. In particular it will:
- improve the promotion and provision of pre-natal services;
 - improve the information available to mothers about the options available for childbirth;
 - ensure that benchmarks for the appropriate use of caesarean section and ultrasound are professionally developed and used to improve service delivery;
 - increase the accessibility of birthing centres;
 - increase the ability to access independent midwives and midwife-led models of care;
 - redirect resources into post-birth health care services, which are currently under-resourced;
 - ensure continuity of care is available after a baby is born;
 - implement special programs for Indigenous mothers and babies, to reduce mortality rates and improve health;
 - research the health and well-being of children to monitor and improve outcomes for children;
 - develop a new policy framework to better integrate research and programs to meet the social and health needs of younger children;
 - support and encourage breastfeeding by supporting initiatives like the Australian Breastfeeding Association's 24 hour phone line and lactation specialists visiting new mothers in hospital and breastfeeding workshops for new mothers who have left hospital;
 - review the Medicare Schedule to include midwives in the provision of maternity care and to facilitate the expansion of midwife-led care; and
 - consider models of indemnification to facilitate the practice of midwives as experts and primary care givers in normal birth.

Young Australians

- 59.** Labor recognises the necessity to specifically address the health needs of young Australians, including:
- increasing the proportion of babies breastfed in line with World Health Organisation recommendations;
 - childhood obesity, body image and eating disorders;
 - suicide prevention;
 - drug use prevention and alcohol education;
 - sexuality and safe sex practices;
 - promotion of healthy lifestyles;
 - long-term nursing home type care required as a result of accident or illness; and
 - family support and appropriate alternative social networks to help children in difficulty.
- 60.** Labor recognises the importance of providing appropriate and accessible health services to young people while ensuring confidentiality. Labor supports the current issue of Medicare cards to young Australians to facilitate their access to health services.

Migrant Health

- 61.** Labor recognises that language and cultural differences need to be addressed to ensure fair and equal access to health services for all Australians. In particular, Labor recognises the need for interpreter services, culturally appropriate health services and health education messages in languages other than English.

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Palliative Care

- 62.** Labor believes that every person should have access to quality palliative care. People should be able to decide where they wish to die and to choose the extent of active treatment they want to prolong life as a terminal illness progresses. People have a right to relief from pain and suffering, but there is a need for legal guidelines and safeguards to prevent abuse or wrongful actions. Labor supports legislative measures to give each person a right to determine, in advance, the sort of medical treatment he or she wishes to receive, or not receive, in the event that their medical condition prevents them from expressing that wish.

Role of Private Health

- 63.** The private sector plays an important role in Australia in the delivery of services paid through Medicare and to supplement this with other services that are paid for privately or covered by private health insurance. Labor recognises the role the private health sector can play to complement Medicare and remains committed to a balanced health system making best use of both public and private services. To this end, Labor supports the better integration of services delivered by private sector and public health providers.

Medibank Private

- 64.** Labor is opposed to the sale of Medibank Private. Labor believes that Medibank Private can play an important role as a market leader to hold down premiums and keep the private health insurance market competitive and consumer oriented. There is no evidence that the sale of Medibank Private will reduce premiums or increase competition and for this reason Labor opposes its sale.

Private Health Insurance

- 65.** The private health insurance industry offers commercial products to those who are seeking additional cover for health services, in addition to those covered by Medicare. Labor believes the industry needs to be well regulated in the interests of contributors so that value for money products are available to all policy holders. To this end, Labor believes that further efforts can be made to control health costs, such as those associated with advances in medical technologies and procedures, which would impact directly on private health insurance premium levels. Labor believes that offering simpler products will also provide greater value and transparency for consumers seeking to transfer between funds.
- 66.** Labor will:
- urge funds to increase the proportion of policies that eliminate gap charges without increasing premiums. Doctors and other health professionals who charge gap fees will be required to disclose their additional charges prior to treatment;
 - reform the re-insurance pool to remove the disincentives for funds to operate more efficiently and for the industry to become more competitive;
 - encourage funds to provide cover for a wider range of services to improve the integration of primary and acute care, without disadvantaging the public hospital system;
 - provide consumers with access to independent information and require funds to disclose rises in premiums. Funds will be required to further simplify their products so that consumers can readily compare policies;
 - give the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman additional powers and resources to investigate policy issues and to develop a Consumer Charter for the industry, setting minimum standards; and
 - ensure that patient choice and clinical decision making remain at the heart of health care, rather than giving power to funds to determine what kind of care is appropriate.

Harnessing New Technology and Managing Patient Information

- 67.** Labor sees major opportunities for new technology to make health services more effective, more accessible and more consumer friendly. Technological change needs to be carefully managed with close attention to the social and ethical implications and the need for privacy for personal health records. Labor will ensure that commercial interests do not subvert intended health outcomes and that decisions are made on the basis of clinical and cost effectiveness determined by the best available research evidence.
- 68.** Labor will, in collaboration with State and Territory governments, build information technology and communication infrastructure and systems that improve the decisions made by consumers, clinicians and health service managers about care, service delivery and policy. The purpose of this investment will be to:
- build accessible knowledge bases from quality data systems, libraries of research evidence and the experience of consumers and professionals;
 - enhance online communication between consumers and professionals, and primary and acute care settings, regardless of location, to improve health outcomes and service quality; and
 - create data management systems that monitor population health and the safety, quality and efficiency of health services.

- 69.** Labor will ensure that appropriate training is undertaken by health professionals to develop and maintain the skills necessary to use these knowledge bases, health records and communication systems.
- 70.** Labor believes the development and implementation of health knowledge management systems that include electronic health records and decision support systems for evidence-based practice are central to improving the safety and quality of health services. However, these new tools cannot be widely used until satisfactory arrangements are in place to protect security and privacy.
- 71.** Labor will ensure every Australian has a personal electronic health record that is privacy protected. Labor will develop a strong privacy regime built around a unique patient identifier based on the Medicare card. Legislation will prohibit this number being used for any other purpose and access will depend on authorisation from both the patient and the doctor. A range of other safeguards will be incorporated in legislation, which will be developed after a public inquiry into all the issues.
- 72.** It is critical that health providers can communicate effectively with each other while maintaining patient confidentiality. Labor will provide leadership in the development of national, secure health data standards and will establish a common framework for health record systems. The delay in establishing this infrastructure is inhibiting the delivery of quality health services in Australia and contributing to unnecessary adverse events. Specifically Labor will ensure:
- the use of tele-health to give rural clinicians direct access to city based specialists and the resources of major teaching hospitals;
 - the use of secure electronic networks to give clinicians and pharmacists access to high quality drug information sources; and
 - the use of electronic prescriptions to speed up and reduce errors in communications between clinicians and pharmacists.
- 73.** Labor will give Medicare Australia greater powers to analyse data to examine variations in practices, to enable the promotion of professional practice based on the best available evidence from research. Clinicians will be supported in their evidence-based practice through the development of appropriate, accessible clinical guidelines and pathways of care.

Empowering Users of Health Services

- 74.** Labor recognises that the Australian public wants and needs clear and relevant information about their health care. Many Australians feel under-informed about their health care and this lack of information can cause unnecessary anxiety about appropriate treatments.
- 75.** Labor believes that all health service users have the right to:
- receive information about their condition, treatment options and risks and give informed consent before receiving health services;
 - give informed financial consent, before receiving health services, which includes obtaining estimated costs of proposed procedures;
 - expect privacy for their health records and other information relating to their health and use of health services;
 - obtain access to their health records; and
 - indicate, ahead of time, their unwillingness to have their life prolonged by artificial means in the event of a terminal illness.

- 76.** Labor believes that better informed health service users will participate more actively in the health decision making process leading to a reduction in the incidence of adverse events, fostering a greater partnership approach between user and providers and increasing user satisfaction with the care provided.
- 77.** Labor will promote users' access to timely, accurate and relevant health information through support for public internet sites which provide independent, evidence-based sources of information for people to research their health problems.
- 78.** Labor will encourage the development of educational materials about treatment options, medicines and procedures associated with a variety of clinical conditions, for consumers.
- 79.** A strong and independent complaints system is essential to ensuring that patients' rights are respected and should also play a constructive role in reform.

Health and Medical Research

- 80.** Labor will encourage and invest in excellence in health and bio-medical research to improve the health of all Australians, and to boost Australia's reputation as a world leader in high quality, innovative research and development activities.
- 81.** In particular Labor will:
 - increase the Commonwealth government's contribution to the research effort and ensure that other funding sources maintain or increase their effort during this period;
 - establish career structures and pay scales for Australian medical researchers to encourage retention of our best researchers and to be internationally competitive;
 - encourage private industry to increase its investment in Australian-based research and development;
 - give priority to innovative research that will improve the knowledge base, address national priorities and help Australia be commercially competitive;
 - ensure that advances in knowledge are translated and applied to the benefit of the nation's health and health services;
 - work with stakeholders to ensure that comprehensive ethical guidelines to cover both public and private sector research are developed and regularly reviewed; and
 - ensure that the National Health and Medical Research Council is able to address the strategies, policies and priorities for the nation's health, free from political interference.

Improving the Quality of Health Services

- 82.** Labor is committed to improving the quality of health services. Labor will measure the quality of health services provided against six quality principles: access, efficiency, effectiveness, appropriateness, safety and consumer satisfaction.
- 83.** Labor will invest in and promote knowledge management to:
 - improve the flow of information through the health care system;
 - reduce the variation in the use and outcomes of health services; and
 - ensure the efficient implementation of evidence based health care.
- 84.** Labor will develop benchmarks for health service performance and standards of treatment for public and private providers. This information will be available to consumers to help choose their preferred health service, and to inform managers and health care providers.

- 85.** Labor believes the funders, managers, providers, and consumers of our health services have a role to play in improving the quality of health services. Labor will identify and promote mechanisms that assist stakeholders to take an active role in improving the quality of health services and to ensure that they are held accountable for their performance within the health system.
- 86.** Quality health service delivery depends on cooperative working relationships between governments, professional bodies, community organisations, the public and private health sectors and consumers in the planning and delivery of health services. Labor will work in partnership with all parties to improve the quality of our health services.

National Drugs Strategy

- 87.** Labor recognises the serious health and social impact that legal and illegal drug use has on the Australian community. Tobacco use continues to cause harm to the individual and the community. Other legal drugs such as alcohol can cause damage if not used in moderation and are a major factor in domestic violence and road accidents. Greater efforts are needed to prevent and address the significant health and social problems caused by illegal drugs.
- 88.** Labor is committed to developing innovative, integrated strategies to improve the outcomes of alcohol and drug interventions provided by specialist alcohol and drug services, general and mental health services, youth and family services, disability services, housing services, law enforcement and the criminal justice system, policy and research services and Indigenous services.
- 89.** Labor will ensure that the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments work together to develop models that coordinate the alcohol and drug interventions provided by all relevant services to maximise positive outcomes for the community.
- 90.** Labor recognises the need to improve the coordination of care across a range of services. Labor will work towards enhancing cross-sector, complex case management between services and health professionals.
- 91.** Central to Labor's drug strategy are the principles of prevention of onset of drug use, early intervention and harm minimisation for all illicit drugs. Labor will, in consultation with expert bodies, drug and alcohol agencies, community groups and peak organisations:
- curb the supply of illegal drugs through effective law enforcement;
 - tackle the underlying causes of both legal and illegal drug problems in order to reduce demand;
 - reduce the demand for illegal drugs and tobacco and reduce the misuse of alcohol through targeted advertising and public health education campaigns;
 - increase the opportunities for treatment and harm reduction for people with drug problems; and
 - ensure supply and consumption rates are monitored and reduced to minimise alcohol harm.

Tobacco

- 92.** Labor will focus on the prevention and reduction of the harm caused by tobacco by further tightening restrictions on tobacco advertising, conducting aggressive anti-smoking campaigns and developing national clean air standards to address passive smoking. A new focus will be placed on harm minimisation strategies and promotion of nicotine replacement therapies to reach those people not influenced by current Quit programs.

- 93.** Labor believes that more investigation is needed into manufacturing and marketing practices that target younger Australians.
- 94.** Manufacturers of tobacco should be held to account for any unlawful activity in relation to the suppression or destruction of evidence about the health risks associated with smoking and passive smoking.
- 95.** Labor supports an ACCC administered code of practice for the selling of cigarettes to minors. This code will include non-supply of tobacco products to sellers if they breach the code.

Alcohol

- 96.** Labor will promote awareness of safer patterns of alcohol use, aimed at reducing consumption at hazardous and harmful levels. Targeted advertising and public education campaigns, strengthened treatment services and appropriate regulations in areas including taxation, public intoxication, under-aged drinking, and alcohol-related illness can reduce social problems.

Petrol Sniffing and Chroming

- 97.** Labor recognises that the practices of petrol sniffing and chroming are seriously damaging to health. Young people are particularly at risk of harm from the misuse of legally available, volatile substances. Labor's priority is to focus on prevention and also to protect the health and welfare of those who misuse volatile substances or are at risk of misusing them. Adequately funded, community based approaches supported by adequate government services including children's services, correctional services and policing are needed to prevent, minimise and halt the harm caused by these practices.

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Illicit Drugs

- 98.** Labor will work with the States and Territories to develop and implement a comprehensive framework of strategies to address the diverse problems caused by illicit drugs. The focus of the strategies will be prevention of onset of illicit drug use, early intervention and reducing the harm caused by illicit drugs. These strategies will include:
 - developing and implementing comprehensive anti-drug community and education strategies targeting those most in need of information and encouraging drug-free lifestyles. These groups include young people, families, migrants, refugees and Indigenous Australians;
 - additional funding for treatment, primary health care, rehabilitation and diversion services run by government and non-government agencies;
 - support for harm prevention and harm minimisation strategies to prevent the onset of drug use and also deal with drug abuse in cooperation with State, Territory and local governments including targeted advertising and public education campaigns, strengthened treatment for services and clean needle and needle exchange programs;
 - research based trials of alternative pathways to treat, manage and recover from drug dependence;
 - specialised early intervention support services, including counselling and social support, for families and friends of drug users;
 - culturally appropriate services for young people, Indigenous Australians and migrants to work with mainstream drug and alcohol services;

- support for consultation with service users and peak professional bodies in alcohol and drug service planning and delivery;
- support for community self-help organisations and recognition of the role they play in community support and the re-integration of service users back into the community; and
- provision of advocacy services for treatment recipients of drug and alcohol services.

Road, Sea and Air Trauma

- 99.** Labor will support a comprehensive approach to reduce the incidence of road, sea and air accidents attributable to fatigue, speeding, or alcohol or other drugs.

Food and Therapeutic Products

- 100. Food labelling.** To enjoy healthy lifestyles, Australians and their families need to know what is in the food they are eating and what processes are being used to make food. Labor supports giving consumers essential information to enable them to make an informed choice when purchasing food products.
- 101.** To make certain consumers have access to effective product labelling Labor will ensure that:
- genetically modified food is labelled; and
 - consumers are better informed about the nutritional quality of packaged food through improved nutritional panels.
- 102. Food standards.** Labor is committed to working with State and Territory governments and the New Zealand Government to improve the current system of food safety standards. There is a need for greater transparency in the development of standards and more dialogue between consumers, trade unions and industry on technical issues.
- 103.** Australia should bring its standards into line with world's best practice while allowing sufficient flexibility for State-based implementation.
- 104.** These standards need to be backed by quality implementation, ongoing monitoring and enforcement where necessary. Labor will work with all stakeholders to spread the burden of cost to protect small business and local councils.
- 105. Genetically modified food.** Labor recognises community concern about genetically modified food. To ensure our food is safe and of a high quality, Labor will:
- maintain consumer and environmental safety through strict enforcement of national standards as the principal policy consideration;
 - build public confidence by providing appropriate and balanced public education;
 - ensure all issues pertaining to import, export, production, distribution and use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are overseen by a strong national body that is independent, scientifically based and whose processes are transparent;
 - establish a meaningful labelling regime that enables consumers to make informed choices about what they are buying;
 - undertake continued research on the use of foods containing GMOs to better understand health, safety and environmental risks and benefits; and
 - put in place a rigorous and transparent process based on environmental and safety considerations, for assessing and approving or rejecting research proposals which require the release of GMOs outside the laboratory.

- 106. Food and therapeutic products regulation.** Labor recognises that the ongoing introduction of new technologies has revealed overlaps in the current responsibilities of food, therapeutic products and import/export regulatory bodies.
- 107.** Australia needs a more effective and open regulatory system for setting standards for foods and therapeutic products produced in Australia and imported from other markets. Labor will introduce a comprehensive food and therapeutic products regulatory model to address overlap and gap issues and place responsibility for consumer health and safety protection within an integrated structure.
- 108.** Labor recognises that the standard of regulation of therapeutic goods in Australia is amongst the highest in the world. We will strive to raise the standard by improving transparency and enabling a greater consumer voice.

Sport and Recreation

- 109.** Labor recognises that sport and recreation are an intrinsic part of our culture and way of life—building social cohesion that binds families, communities, regions and the nation. Most important of all are the principles of fairness, accessibility and opportunity. Labor is committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in sport, recreation and physical activity.
- 110.** Labor believes that the role of government in sport and recreation is to:
- increase participation in physical and recreational activities to promote physical and mental health;
 - improve outcomes for public health through encouragement, facilitation and support for healthy lifestyle choices, including regular physical activity and other recreational pursuits;
 - develop and support participation in grass roots community sport and recreation activities; and
 - develop and support high performance athletes through the provision of infrastructure, resources and leadership.
- 111.** Labor will, through the Australian Sports Commission, and in consultation with Australia's sport and recreation community, establish appropriate criteria for the delivery of funding to:
- provide appropriate policies and programs to better deliver sporting and recreational opportunities for all Australians;
 - develop and enhance community based sporting organisations across all regions of Australia in recognition of the important role such organisations play in creating social cohesion;
 - develop and enhance programs and facilities for the Australian Institute of Sport that appropriately reflect our sporting abilities and aspirations;
 - create pathways for the development of high performance athletes that are fair and accessible across all regions of Australia; and
 - assist highly talented athletes to pursue sporting excellence and gain international experience.
- 112.** Labor will examine alternative public and private sector funding options to supplement budgetary initiatives.
- 113.** In consultation with State, Territory and local governments and relevant sporting bodies, Labor will develop a model for Commonwealth government involvement in the provision and

access of community sporting and recreation facilities, especially in rural and regional Australia where it is particularly challenging to establish and maintain facilities.

- 114.** Labor recognises that the enhanced teamwork, communication skills, health benefits and interdependence that arise from sport are vital to young people's development. Labor will provide coordinated funding for community development resources in sport and recreation that address the needs of young people of all ages.
- 115.** Participation in sport and recreation provides public health benefits. Poor diet and lack of fitness are closely associated with major health problems. Labor recognises that physical activity through sport and recreation enhances physical well-being, including improvements in mental health and self esteem.
- 116.** Labor is committed to an integrated approach with the health, education, sport and recreation sectors to address weight-related problems. Labor is committed to addressing the disturbing increase in obesity among Australians, particularly children.
- 117.** Labor is committed to working with the States to improve the opportunity of Australian primary school age children to learn basic physical skills such as running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching.
- 118.** Labor is committed to integrating the development of sport and recreation with its health policy and programs. Labor will develop mechanisms that direct resources into preventive strategies that improve the overall physical health standard of the community by encouraging greater exercise and relaxation.
- 119.** Labor is committed to promoting sport and recreation for older Australians. As well as enjoying obvious personal benefits, older and veteran participants contribute greatly by volunteering and passing on their experience and skills as players, administrators and officials to the younger members of their sporting clubs and organisations.
- 120.** Labor recognises and values the essential contribution of volunteers of all ages to sport and recreation in Australia. Labor notes the declining levels of volunteers and will work with communities to develop strategies to increase opportunities for participation in administration, officiating, coaching and other forms of volunteer support.
- 121.** Labor is committed to ongoing recognition and support of disability sport and supports the integration of athletes with disabilities into mainstream sport. Labor will pursue funding options to ensure that appropriate programs, resources and facilities exist for Paralympic and disability sport.
- 122.** Labor is committed to ongoing recognition and support of Indigenous sport and recreation programs and will ensure there is appropriate support, resources and facilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 123.** Labor is strongly committed to raising the profile of women's sport. Labor will restore the Prime Ministerial Women in Sport Award, increase the profile of women's sport, and undertake efforts to improve the coverage and portrayal of women's sport and the accessibility of the media by women's sporting organisations.
- 124.** Labor will provide support for the promotion of codes of sporting behaviour, ethics and development of workplace health and safety standards through consultation with other levels of government, Australia's sporting community and relevant organisations.
- 125.** Through adequate support for the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority and education programs, Labor will continue to work towards the abolition of all performance enhancing

drugs in sport. Labor supports community based education campaigns in partnership with national sporting bodies that promote health drug free lifestyles.

- 126.** Labor will ensure that all Australians have access to free-to-air television coverage of sport that has major cultural significance.
- 127.** Labor will work with stakeholders to ensure sporting venues and events are as accessible as possible for all Australians.

Resolutions

Health Blame Game

This Conference condemns the Howard Government and in particular the comments of Health Minister Tony Abbott who constantly plays the blame game on dental health rather than providing solutions for Australian working families. The result of the Howard Government neglect is that millions of Australians are having their health compromised. This Conference endorses Kevin Rudd's commitment to a national dental scheme to alleviate the pain and suffering of Australians whose dental health has been compromised by an arrogant and uncaring Howard Government.

Childcare

Conference recognises the importance of high quality early years services for our children, and believes that early childhood care and education must be a national priority.

Labor recognises that child care has a dual role in helping parents, especially mothers, return to work, helping to lift workforce participation, and as a early development opportunity for children where early play-based early learning gives our children the best start in life.

Conference recognises the importance of investing in the early years, and the need for universal access to play-based learning for all four year olds.

Universal early learning must be integrated within the existing childcare settings to provide the greatest benefit to our children.

Conference also acknowledges the wide range of international research and experience which shows that early learning opportunities have the greatest benefit for those from the most-disadvantaged backgrounds, and wants expanded early childhood programs in disadvantaged communities, as a priority. Conference notes the increasing cost of childcare which has skyrocketed under the Howard Government, and is concerned that these massive price increases are putting childcare out of the reach of many parents. Conference calls on Federal Labor to expand access to childcare through additional childcare centres, integrated with other community and educational facilities, and to provide increased support to families. Quality of care is also critical, and Conference supports Federal Labor working to improve childcare regulations, in conjunction with the States and Territories, by developing a consistent national child care framework which drives quality improvement across the child care sector.

Improvements in quality of care will only be achieved through a highly skilled and properly paid workforce of childcare professionals.