



MEDIA RELEASE, 13 May 2021

Budget garners support for aged care, mental health, and primary care delivery, but more consultation needed going forward says ACDHS.

The ACDHS has warmly welcomed the 2021/22 Budget which has delivered some long-awaited reforms on aged care, mental health service provision, telehealth, and additional training and clinical placement opportunities for allied health students but more consultation will be needed.

With health and social care emerging as one of the biggest winners in this year's Budget, the Australian Council of Deans for Health Sciences is pleased that many areas have been addressed in such a tight fiscal environment, however there are still ongoing opportunities to harness the capacity of universities to ensure the health workforce delivers high-quality, evidence-based care that meets the needs of the community.

Professor Esther May, Chair, ACDHS, said the Budget had delivered on some long-awaited reforms, particularly in the areas of aged care and mental health.

"We are pleased to see moves that embrace a more multidisciplinary approach which has allied health providers rightly positioned alongside doctors and nurses to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians."

"Workforce will be the key enabler. The ACDHS has been campaigning for increased allied health access in aged care settings and funding to build stronger industry partnerships which will allow for clinical placements in primary care settings. We now need to work on making that happen as we go forward, as many details are still to be revealed in how this Budget will translate into action."

Aged care

- The ACDHS welcomed the \$17.7 billion funding allocation in the Budget to aged care reform, largely driven by the 2020 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. However, major commitments to increase staffing within aged care facilities are still largely confined to a greater time allocation with registered nurses. The ACDHS believes allied health services should be regarded as a core service within both aged and disability settings, and that provision of services should be needs-based and person-centred.
- Budget provision for an additional 80,000 home care packages is to be applauded. Allied health services form an important part of this model which enables more Australians to stay in their own homes. However, it is noted that this figure is to be delivered over two years and still falls short of the 100,000 older Australians on a waitlist. It is hoped the development of a new 'support at home' program by 2023 as announced in the Budget will address some key issues. The Council welcomes the opportunity to discuss the need for further in-home services aimed at reablement, rehabilitation, and wellbeing. We would also like to examine ways to further reduce the complexity of funding models that may prove a barrier for older people.

"The ACDHS looks forward to working closely with all stakeholders including federal government to further develop many of the Budget initiatives which support extensive aged care reform. Universities can play a stronger role in researching best practice models and in forming strategic partnerships with

aged care providers to assist with improving training outcomes and in an advisory capacity. In the future we hope to see the establishment of additional funding to support training and clinical placements for allied health students within both residential settings and with home-based service providers.”

“For aged care services to deliver the quality of care that the community expects then placement capacity will need to increase. Mechanisms that facilitate and support partnerships between health and education, allowing more students to experience aged care outside of an acute setting like a hospital where many patients may be at their most frail, is the vital next step”.

Mental health

- The ACDHS believe the \$58.8 million spending commitment by government to upskill the mental health workforce is particularly significant.

“For the first time it represents the multidisciplinary approach that is needed to make an impact on addressing mental health issues that affect one in five Australians, from teenagers to the elderly.

“The Council is particularly pleased with new funding allocated to increasing the number of allied health practitioners working in community mental health programs enabled through 280 new scholarships and 350 additional clinical placements. Access to adequate undergraduate training opportunities outside of acute settings is essential for the development of an integrated primary health workforce that can deliver quality evidence-based care.”

Support for dementia post-graduate study

- The ACDHS also welcomes additional funding to support 100 new post-graduate scholarships each year for allied health professionals with a focus on dementia qualifications. Research into issues affecting dementia and evaluation of new treatment options will change the lives of millions of Australians.

“Our member universities have a strong track record in driving cutting-edge treatment solutions that have been implemented effectively in clinical settings and have been proven to deliver results. We welcome further support to establish additional post-graduate research opportunities looking at best-practice dementia approaches.”

Rural and regional allied health training

- New measures in the Budget to support community-based allied health delivery in rural and regional areas of Australia are welcomed by the ACDHS.

“In addition to further funding for the training of medical students, we note the important move in this package of reforms to acknowledge the importance of allied health training with \$9.6 million including 90 workplace training packages through the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway, and 30 packages allocated to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, and the introduction of 30 new Allied Health Assistant packages, as well as the expansion of existing collaborative primary care models in key states.

“The ACDHS hopes further funding for rural and regional allied health undergraduate clinical placements and training will be implemented in the future to address a chronic skills shortage in these areas of Australia and to improve health outcomes for all Australians no matter where they live. Incentivising health service providers to establish rural allied health training positions would also encourage more graduates to consider a career in regional areas of Australia.”

Workforce – data gap analysis

- The ACDHS has been advocating for funding that enables better understanding of key issues and builds future workforce capability. The announcement of special funding in 2021-22 for an allied health data gap analysis to improve the visibility, transparency, and impact of allied health services to better support an aged care workforce of the future is an important first step. The Council hopes in the future data can be gathered from all sectors involving the allied health professions including health, disability, education, and social services to inform more holistic workforce planning.

“Developing a detailed data base will allow for better planning for resources and enable measurement of effectiveness of responses to current needs in aged care so this funding allocation is timely. This is an important step in evaluating allied health capacity for sector. However, we also need to examine other areas of workforce shortage in relation to community need, including in disability services. Funding for wider data studies is essential.”

ENDS

For more information:

Jen Coulls, Australian Council of Deans for Health Sciences

Phone: 0407 885 003

secretariat@acdhs.edu.au

[**www.acdhs.edu.au**](http://www.acdhs.edu.au)