Interview with Nicola Roxon, Minister, Department of Health and Ageing

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Tags: Department of Health And Ageing

New Government health priorities and policies, highlighting those concerning preventive health.

The Rudd Labor Government’s goal in health is to create a modern health system designed for the health needs of the 21st century, including the growing burden of chronic disease. Bringing a greater focus to prevention in health policy is a key part of this agenda.

Level of Government collaboration between the states and territories with regard to healthcare access and quality of medicines.

The Rudd Government is committed to ending the blame game between the Commonwealth and the states. We are currently working with the states and territories to establish new, more flexible and accountable funding arrangements for hospitals and health, to take effect from 1 July 2009. These discussions are canvassing a range of issues including issues related to medication management upon discharge from hospital.

Programs implemented for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to increase their life expectancy to the level of any Australian citizen.

The Australian Government is committed to closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within a generation. The key to achieving this goal will be to take practical steps to improve the health status as well as the social and economic wellbeing of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the most recent Budget, the Government committed $334.8 million towards new initiatives designed to help close the gap..

Health and Hospital Reform Plan – Main highlights and explanation of the new $10 billion Health and Hospitals Fund.

The $10 billion Health and Hospitals Fund – the single biggest investment in health infrastructure ever made by an Australian Government – will support strategic investments in health designed to equip the Australian health and hospital system for the future. The Guidelines on the operation of the Fund are currently being developed.

Looking at the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme – how have and will the Scheme reforms and post reforms further impact the healthcare system; and room for improvements?

The purpose of the PBS is to provide reliable, timely and affordable access to a wide range of medicines for all Australians. Recent reforms to the PBS are designed to put PBS expenditure onto a sustainable footing into the future. The Rudd Government will continue implementation of these reforms and will closely monitor their impact to ensure that they do not have an adverse effect on consumers and/or the generic medicines sector.

Australian Government commitment to supporting an environment that encourages research and provides a stable policy base for a sustainable Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme system to support the community and the industry in the long term.

The Rudd Government is committed to working with the medicines sector to ensure continued investment in research and development in the area of pharmaceuticals in Australia.

In their effort to cut down ever rising healthcare cost, putting pressure on the price of pharmaceuticals is often seen as the ideal solution by governments around the world. Isn’t there a danger that such policies end up deterring research and development expenditures, thus putting at stake the future of the industry? What are the alternative solutions?

The Rudd Government views expenditure on pharmaceuticals as an investment in health, not simply a cost. We know that more than two thirds of PBS expenditure already relates to prevention and management of chronic disease. So, while we believe it is very important to ensure that the cost of the PBS remains sustainable into the future, we are very aware that this needs to be balanced with the need for an environment that encourages research and development of new medicines.

Possible cooperation scenarios between the industry and the Ministry for Health and Ageing to work together towards better meeting the health needs of Australians.

I am always willing to hear ideas on how we can work with industry to better meet the health needs of all Australians. There are already a number of formal avenues where the industry can raise these ideas, such as the Access to Medicines Working Group and Pharmaceutical Industry Working Group.

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