

In tonight's federal budget, Australians would have been looking for an investment in their health.

Over the past two years, the pandemic has disrupted health care. The health and financial impacts of missed opportunities for early diagnosis and treatment on the health system are likely to be long-term, and waiting lists have grown.

'In this budget, resources towards catching up on the high numbers of patient for whom care was delayed should have been a given. Funding as a one-off boost to capacity for breast cancer, cervical screening and colonoscopy triage is welcomed, yet this only addresses one element of delayed care, with nothing further reflected in public hospital funding beyond recurrent spending and planned growth,' says Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association Acting CEO Kylie Woolcock.

'With widespread COVID infection across the Australian population, there is going to be a need for investment in Long COVID management and care services. The symptoms are diverse, but able to be managed in primary and community care. Enabling outcomes-focused, value-based care, provided by teams of general practitioners, nurses and allied health providers is critical in minimising the long-term burden.

'The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequities in Australia's health, and we know these gaps will only widen if investments are not made now.

'It is not just the size of the investment, but the terms of that investment. Longer term funding approaches are necessary in rural and remote regions for health care models to be successful and sustainable, and we welcome the 10-year strategic agreement with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) that provides the necessary security for the communities it serves. However, there are many communities that would benefit from the security and certainty in the services that such long-term commitments can provide.'

Reorienting the health system to value over volume is dependent on a national health information strategy to consolidate health information, promote cross-sector linkages and promote efficient, timely and consistent data collection and reporting. The budget should have provided the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) the remit for this to continue.

'And while \$32.3 million will be put to continuing the Intergovernmental Agreement on Digital Health with states and territories, supporting My Health Record and the Health Care Identifiers, further digital health investment appears to be prioritising streamlining administration over enabling the transformation of the way health care is provided.

'Critical investment in driving innovation is lacking in primary and community care. Without it, problems of affordability for individuals and the system will continue to grow. The budget has done little to address this.'

An online version of this [media release](#) may be found on the [AHHA website](#).

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association is the national peak body for public and not-for-profit healthcare.

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