

With the Federal Budget for 2024-25 handed down not quite a month ago and an increase in spending on health and aged care of \$9.7 billion, many in the health sector still feel we could receive more value out of this vast expenditure.

‘For critical areas of the health system such as primary care and rural and regional health care, which face enormous pressures, this Budget has a way to go in reassuring Australians they will have a sustainable health system for the future,’ says Dr Sonj Hall, Editor in Chief of the [Australian Health Review](#), of which the June 2024 issue was released today.

‘As Professor Claire Jackson AM discusses in her Perspective piece in this issue, five national reviews have supported the need for primary care reform, yet action on these vital reforms has been slow.’

‘We can't solve these problems with just more of the same funding. However, we can work towards a sustainable primary care system for all Australians by implementing targeted initiatives such as payment reform, improving equity in pay and conditions for the primary care workforce, and promoting increased collaboration between the federal and state governments,’ continues Dr Hall.

‘Rural and regional health care is much in need of long-term investment and reform. While the majority of our population is based in urban centres, those living in regional and remote areas will likely have a higher burden of disease, lower life expectancy and increased expenses and distances to travel in order to access basic healthcare.’

‘Maximising the value of investments in regional and remote healthcare should be a priority. This could involve finding ways to provide cardiac rehabilitation services to people with heart disease in remote areas through improved models of care led by co-design or using under-utilised rural hospitals to reduce surgical waiting lists for certain outpatient surgeries. This issue of the Australian Health Review also explores lessons learned from a health service merger, as discussed by Emeritus Professor Stephen Duckett AM.’

In this case study, Professor Duckett follows the merger of four hospitals in western Victoria, as it aimed to address the issues of inequitable health outcomes for the Wimmera region, low and declining access to local health services, under and over-utilised resources across the region and workforce gaps. This case study highlights the importance of adequate resourcing, funding, expertise, communication, and time in driving successful mergers in the healthcare sector.

‘We must continue to invest in our healthcare system's foremost asset, its workforce. The Budget did deliver some valuable workforce programs such as the new Commonwealth Prac Payment, to help elevate ‘placement poverty’ in trainee nurses during practical placements, but further research is needed to develop strong training foundations and to promote transformational leadership within our workforce, and ensure staff can provide care that is culturally safe,’ says Dr Hall.

The online version of this [media release](#) and links to the [Australian Health Review](#) can be found on the AHHA website. **The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.**

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Australian Health Review: Beyond Budget increases, transformative reforms needed in health sector

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‘These topics are also further examined in the June 2024 issue of the Australia Health Review.’

The [Australian Health Review](#) is the Australian Healthcare and Hospital Association’s peer-reviewed journal. It explores major national and international health issues and questions. Topics include all aspects of health policy and management, healthcare delivery systems, clinical programs, health financing and other matters of interest to those working in health care.

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