



ACT Government

2005-2006 BUDGET

MEDIA RELEASE

RECORD SPEND ON HEALTH

The ACT Government had proved its commitment to improving the Territory's health system with a record amount of funding on health in the 2005–06 Budget, Health Minister Simon Corbell said today.

"The strength of this Budget is its determination to tackle difficult issues in our health system like hospital waiting lists and access block, and in implementing election commitments in a fiscally responsible way," he said.

Mr Corbell said total overall spending on health was \$689.9 million, the highest amount the Territory had ever allocated to it. In addition, \$20 million would be allocated to new capital works.

"This Budget has allocated a further \$2 million to increase throughput and refine clinical prioritisation processes for patients awaiting elective surgery," he said.

"This will provide an additional 300 elective surgery operations in 2005–06, rising to 400 in 2006–07.

"The program will focus upon patients waiting excessively long times and ensure that those with the greatest clinical need receive treatment first.

"A portion of this \$2 million will be allocated, in 2005–06 only, to a program of business process improvement that will improve the efficiency of patient flows within hospitals."

Mr Corbell said this Budget initiative further added to the \$20.4 million in additional funding for elective surgery allocated in previous budgets by this ACT Government through to 2008.

As part of a portfolio-wide program to improve access to acute hospital services and to ease the pressure on medical beds the Budget had allocated \$2.3 million for an additional 20 medical beds in ACT public hospitals.

"Access to sufficient staffed and equipped acute medical beds is essential for the treatment of patients in our public hospitals," he said.

The 20 beds — 12 at Calvary and eight at The Canberra Hospital (TCH) — were in addition to 60 rehabilitation beds at the sub acute facility at Calvary Hospital scheduled to come on line in late 2006.



Up to 25 additional nurses and eight allied health staff would be recruited for the beds to become operational in 2005-06. The cost of employing the additional staff was included in the \$2.3 million.

"As part of a portfolio-wide program to improve access to acute hospital services, and to improve Emergency Department response times, a further \$250,000 has been allocated for the discharge lounges already in operation at the ACT's two public hospitals," he said.

"Only seven months since it opened, the discharge lounge at The Canberra Hospital has had more than 1100 patients use the facility.

"This service is functioning well and is lifting the pressure off the Emergency Department by making more beds available to admit patients.

Mr Corbell said the Budget had provided \$2.5 million in 2005-06 for the implementation of a state-of-the-art imaging system for The Canberra Hospital (TCH).

This Picture Archival Communication System (PACS) will replace the current film based imaging service that involves the development, distribution and storage management of hardcopy medical images, providing the hospital with digital capture, storage, viewing, distribution, manipulation and printing of medical images.

There was also an additional \$750,000 for chemotherapy services in the ACT in recognition of the growth in demand for this treatment, which is one of the principal forms of treatment for a range of cancers, and an additional \$1.7 million to public hospitals in the ACT for pharmaceuticals.

Commenting on the 2005-06 ACT Budget, Mr Corbell said access to pharmaceuticals in public hospitals was a key plank in providing safe, effective health care.

"Over the years, the cost of pharmaceuticals has increased at a rate well in excess of inflation," he said.

"Another health issue addressed in the Budget is falls prevention," Mr Corbell said. "The ACT Government has provided recurrent funding of \$300,000 so that this issue can be addressed in the longer term as Canberra's population both grows and ages. This funding will enable Healthpact to provide community grants specifically for falls prevention.

"Falls in the elderly are a major cause of injury, disability, nursing home admission and even death," he said.

"Tackling this issue will result in a decrease in the number of elderly Canberrans in residential care and their related disabilities, which means less costs in our public hospitals and community health services.

In relation to nursing, \$250,000 has been provided to establish nurse practitioner positions in the ACT.

"Our new nurse practitioners will start work in hospital and community settings early in the new financial year," he said.

"A Nurse Practitioner is a registered nurse who has specialised nursing expertise, knowledge, skills and experience supported by education at Masters level, and legislation which enables them to work autonomously as clinical nursing leaders.

Funding of \$278,000 had also been provided to reduce the denture waiting list and general anaesthetic waiting list in the Dental Health Program, and to maintain the restorative waiting list at its current level of seven months.

In relation to capital works, Mr Corbell said funds had been made available for:

- the refurbishment of the roof of the existing Health Protection Service building at Holder – (\$1 million);
- relocating medical records at The Canberra Hospital to free up space for clinical functions (\$3.38 million);
- a feasibility study to address the long-term strategic physical needs of The Canberra Hospital, including an Ambulatory Care Centre and Hot Floor for acute services (\$500,000);
- a study to identify a site for the proposed relocation of The Canberra Hospital's Helipad and the possibility of a multi-storey car park (\$310,000); and
- fire safety upgrades at both The Canberra Hospital (\$2.6 million) and Calvary (\$1 million).

Statement ends