



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Health the focus of Budget in improving economic circumstances**

The Budget has provided some further detail of the Government's proposed health reforms in broad terms of programs but the actual fine detail as to where, when and how still needs to be revealed.

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor, is initially happy with the programs that include increased funding for Primary health care, mental health and hospitals but he is keen to see how that will filter down to the large and small communities of the electorate and, more broadly, regional Australia.

He was also supportive of the announcement of a Productivity Commission inquiry into the aged care system.

"The Government's proposed health reforms have been a major component of the Budget papers and, given the importance of health, I am pleased to see this.

Australia needs to act now on its health system and really implement measures that will deliver services in as accessible way as humanly possible.

Training of more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals has received more funding and I particularly welcome a focus on regional Australia's needs.

The focus on mental health of young people in regional Australia is also being recognised, however to deliver the service will need making it attractive for mental health nurses and service providers to practice in country areas.

With an ageing population, I welcome the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the aged care sector.

Even though most country people know the problems associated with this sector, a Productivity Commission Inquiry should be able to formally identify and quantify these problems and suggest appropriate action by Government to plan for the future," Mr Windsor said.

In more general terms, according to Mr Windsor, the Government appears to have reined the predictions of last year.

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“Last year at this time, predictions were that 2009 was going to be our annus horribilis due to the Global Financial Crisis.

“This year the Budget has a \$40.8b deficit as against \$58b last year and the Government forecasts that it will be back in the black by 2012-13 three years ahead of their prediction last year (although this is based on the mining rent tax which has not been legislated as yet).

“This is from Revenue of \$321.8B with Expenses of \$354.6B.

“The Budget Papers suggest that the stimulus package has been successful in limiting unemployment and filling a void from the private sector’s lack of investment during the global meltdown.

“In technical terms, the peak debt is 6.1% of GDP or half what was expected a year ago and one tenth the average peak debt across major advanced countries,” Mr Windsor said.

Whilst much of the Budget is about funding for programs and doesn’t directly identify specific projects or beneficiaries of support in individual electorates, Mr Windsor says that the New England Electorate has fared well.

Mr Windsor is pleased with funds provided through various portfolios such as health, education and infrastructure which include:

- The Cancer Care Clinic in Tamworth for \$42m
- Roads to Recovery program funding increases
- National Broadband Network rollout in Armidale
- The upgrade of the Murrurundi Rail Tunnel
- Ongoing works on the Hunter North West Rail Corridor
- Funding for the Liverpool Plains Water Study
- And other smaller projects that will be identified through the myriad of other programs in the months ahead.

Mr Windsor said that funding for projects like the Barraba Pipeline and Chaffey Dam could be eligible for funding assistance under the “Water for the Future” program that has had \$1billion allocated to it to reduce cities and towns reliance on rainfall, something the people of Barraba understand only too well.

### **Renewable Energy hypocrisy**

Although the Government has announced a new Renewable Energy Fund to encourage solar, wind and geothermal energy sources, biofuels (ethanol) will face a fossil fuel tax impost of 12.5c/litre in 2015 hence impeding a potential option for farmland use in Australia.

### **Wheat Marketing Review**

The Government has also asked the Productivity Commission to undertake a review of the Wheat Marketing system post the removal of the single desk.

### **Further comment after further analysis and feedback from community members**