



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

General Secretary: Brett Holmes | Assistant General Secretary: Judith Kiejda

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30 July, 2014

Nurses and midwives vow to fight for the universality of Medicare

The future of Medicare and the importance of retaining a universal healthcare scheme in Australia was a reoccurring topic during the first day of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association's (NSWNMA) 69th annual conference in Sydney today.

More than 560 nursing and midwifery delegates and non-members gathered at the Rosehill Gardens Grand Pavilion to hear from a variety of guest speakers during Professional Day.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said the broad theme *'Health: Whose Responsibility?'* generated an engaging discussion about access to healthcare in Australia and concerns around the apparent Americanisation of our universal healthcare system.

"Our members are deeply concerned about what lies ahead for Medicare and what impacts any proposed changes, such as the introduction of a co-payment for GP visits and out of hospital pathology and radiology tests, will have on them in the workplace," Mr Holmes said.

"The fact the federal government appears intent on going down the path of a US-style managed care health system and that our state government is pressing ahead with privatisation opportunities for public hospitals, disability services and is putting mental health and palliative care services out to tender is very alarming."

Dr Anne-Marie Boxall, Director of the Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, discussed the universality of Medicare being eroded and canvassed the need to tackle two key problems: the growing prevalence of chronic disease and the awkward role of private health insurance in relation to Medicare.

"We do need reform in Australia's healthcare system, but the problem is not just Medicare – we need to find a way of making the existing system more sustainable and work better for everyone in our society," Dr Boxall said.

Peter Martin, Economics Editor for The Age, highlighted the overarching costs of healthcare in Australia and rhetoric used by the federal government to explain its current health policy proposals to address those costs.

"Our concerns about health have been on the rise over recent years, more so than concerns about taxes. The value for money question is not just a health issue, in fact, it's going to be the issue between now and the middle of the century – nothing will be more important," said Mr Martin.

"When referring to the Budget, Treasurer Joe Hockey is not right when he says there is an emergency, but he's right when he says there's a problem – in time we will have to balance the Budget."



During his address, Mr Martin supported the NSWNMA's ongoing campaign for the introduction of a Robin Hood Tax (a financial transactions tax), which calls for the implementation of a modest levy on the trading of financial instruments such as shares, bonds and futures.

Tomorrow, the NSW Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research, Jillian Skinner, will address the nursing and midwifery delegates attending the annual conference. The delegates will also have the opportunity to participate in a question and answer session with the Health Minister.

The NSWNMA delegates will also be addressed by the Shadow Minister for Health, Dr Andrew McDonald, and take part in a Q&A session on Thursday.

The 69th annual conference runs today until Friday, August 1 at the Rosehill Gardens Grand Pavilion.

**** Media Alert ****

Media are welcome to attend the NSWNMA's 69th annual conference in the Grand Pavilion at Rosehill Gardens, enter via Gate One (NB: Notices of motion and Association general business are closed to media). Highlights will include:

THURSDAY, 31 JULY 2014

11.15am to 12noon – NSW Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner

12noon to 12.45pm – Shadow Health Minister, Dr Andrew McDonald

FRIDAY, 1 AUGUST 2014

11.00am to 11.30am – Lee Thomas, Federal Secretary ANMF and Annie Butler, Assistant Federal Secretary ANMF

11.30am to 12.45pm – Malinda Markowitz, Vice President of National Nurses United and Britta Houser, California Nurses Association

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