
Strengthening the system

VHA 2022 federal election positions

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Strengthening the system: 2022 federal election positions

About the Victorian Healthcare Association

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) is the peak body supporting Victoria's public and community health services to deliver high-quality care. Established in 1938, the VHA represents Victoria's diverse public healthcare sector, including public hospitals, aged care and community health services.

As well as providing a unified voice for the sector, the VHA delivers value for its members by offering tailored professional development programs, networking opportunities, and informative events. The VHA advocates on behalf of its members on sector-critical issues.

Election positions

Addressing our health workforce shortage

- Create an industry-specific visa for the health and wellbeing sector
- Invest in rural and regional training pipeline and infrastructure

Funding the future of health

- Provide 50:50 funding towards the National Health Reform funding agreement and remove the growth cap
- Include out-of-hospital care in the National Health Reform Agreement

National leadership to drive local solutions

Victoria's health system has been under considerable stress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not alone in facing these issues, but Victoria's public and community health services have faced more sustained pressure than any other jurisdiction. These pressures continue, as services face staff furloughing, increased emergency demand and greater patient acuity.

The recent 2022-23 Federal Budget [did not](#) deliver the support and leadership required in the current circumstances. This is why the 2022 federal election is vital – the next Commonwealth Government should invest in health.

The VHA's federal election positions build on our recent *Stabilising the System* [white paper](#), which highlighted potential solutions to support Victoria's healthcare system, and the recent [Federal Budget briefing](#).

These positions call for Commonwealth leadership in prioritising workforce immigration, support for rural and regional training, increasing health funding, and supporting greater care in the community. The next Commonwealth Government has a vital role to support and augment the health response post-pandemic.

Addressing our health workforce shortage

Create an industry-specific visa for the health and wellbeing sector

The reduction of immigration during the pandemic has exacerbated existing health workforce shortages. Immigration is a key tool to support care delivery, particularly, but not exclusively, in rural and regional areas. Broader immigration support to overcome this, that the states cannot provide, is required.

It is vital that the next Commonwealth Government establishes an industry-specific visa – aiding efforts to fill the skills gaps, deliver ‘catch-up’ care, and support longer-term health system recovery. This would be in line with recent support for other sectors, supporting services involved in acute care, community health and aged care. The visa offers an opportunity to remove bureaucratic restrictions, streamlining the immigration pathway for overseas professionals.

Invest in the rural and regional training pipeline and infrastructure

Inequitable health and wellbeing workforce distribution continues to impact rural and regional care, with current workforce shortages disproportionately impacting rural and regional services.

The next Commonwealth Government should develop a comprehensive package of support for Australia’s rural and regional health training pipeline and infrastructure. This could include providing increased funding for health service training providers, extending Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) debt remittance and Commonwealth support for housing for health professionals.

Funding the future of health

Provide 50:50 funding towards the National Health Reform funding agreement and remove the growth cap

Victoria has, so far, been the state most disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to impact the Victorian health system both directly and indirectly. Despite initial drops in activity at the start of the pandemic, the demand for care has since exceeded pre-pandemic levels, while the health system is still responding to the pandemic.

To ensure the health system can continue to respond to the effects of the pandemic, the next Commonwealth Government should provide equal funding into the National Health Reform Agreement and remove the 6.5 per cent funding increase cap. This ensures there are no artificial restrictions hampering the pandemic response, with responsibility equitably shared between the states, territories, and the Commonwealth.

Include out-of-hospital care in the National Health Reform Agreement

The Victorian health system, as well as the rest of Australia, will be facing pressure arising from the pandemic for the foreseeable future. To reduce the pressure on hospitals, we need to put community health at the heart of care.

The next Commonwealth Government should include out-of-hospital care in the National Health Reform Agreement, by developing a new addendum that funds community health care as acute care. The expanded funding agreement will enable states and territories to better resource an under-utilised aspect of the health system, which will deliver on the Agreement’s aim to prioritise prevention. This leadership will help to drive a wider focus on treating Australians in their communities, leading to better patient outcomes.



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