



Media Release

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Healthcare to devour entire SA budget

Former minister presents confronting demographic data

Adelaide: Analysis to be presented at a cancer conference today (12/11) by former Health Minister John Hill, predicts that South Australia's health system will become unsustainable over the next 20 years unless tough decisions are made.

Mr Hill, South Australian Health Minister from 2005 to 2011, will tell the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting that the state's over-75 population is growing at nine times the rate of people aged under 15, placing a huge burden on health services.

"This pattern is set to continue up until 2040, imposing unprecedented pressure on hospitals and other health services," he said.

"An average South Australian aged over 65 is twice as likely as a younger person to need a hospital bed in a year – and someone aged over 85 is five times more likely to need a bed. And with cancer incidence expected to increase by around 30 per cent each decade as the population ages, oncology services will be stretched beyond capacity.

"These sorts of demands are on track to cost the health system as much as the entire current state budget in 20 years."

Mr Hill said that if the community wanted a sustainable health system, tough questions had to be answered. "Where is our future health workforce going to come from? Will taxpayers accept paying more to support our ageing population, or will they accept a decline in services?"

"Will the community support tough policy reforms aimed at keeping people out of hospitals – like investing a lot more in disease prevention and putting tighter controls around tobacco, alcohol and the causes of obesity?"

"We are running out of time to answer these questions. By international standards South Australia's treatment outcomes for diseases like cancer are good, but we are at risk of going backwards if we don't establish a culture of policy reform in our institutions."

COSA President, Associate Professor Sandro Porceddu, said rising costs and workforce pressures were putting cancer services across the country under increasing strain.

"Because cancer is predominantly a disease of older Australians, incidence will continue to spiral as our population ages," Professor Porceddu said. "The issue is well understood, but without additional investment in our workforce and services, we won't be able to meet the demand."

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