



Sid Sidebottom MP ... for a fair go in Braddon

Media Release

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New health services to support North-West cancer patients, and funding for better health provider communication

IMPROVEMENTS to cancer services, a new clinical information and communications system and better patient accommodation have been delivered to the North-West Coast in the Rudd Government's 2009-10 Budget tonight.

Federal Member for Braddon Sid Sidebottom has welcomed the \$3.6m additions which include:

Networking our health services providers

A \$1.2m, three year project which will develop an electronic clinical information and communications system to link health care providers in North-West Tasmania.

"Once developed, GPs, pharmacies, hospitals, aged care homes and other providers will be linked online, which will deliver huge benefits for both patients and health care workers," Mr Sidebottom said.

"For instance, if someone presents at an emergency room for urgent treatment, and then needs follow-up with their GP, the records of the hospital visit can be instantly transferred to the GP and any other services.

"This will be a huge improvement on the current system and is a response to an important regional health need identified by the Cradle Coast Authority, the North-West Division of General Practice and the Rural Clinical School at the University of Tasmania, Burnie."

Improving cancer services

A \$1.4m, three year funding boost to improve cancer services on the North-West Coast, including the purchase of new equipment and the upgrade of some existing facilities.

"I am currently negotiating with Minister Roxon about specific items, and the Federal Department of Health and Ageing will also work with the Tasmanian Government to identify areas of higher need for services to cancer patients in our region," he said.

Providing more patient accommodation

Another \$1m will be provided for additional patient accommodation services for North-West cancer patients who must travel to the Launceston General Hospital from our region to access the radiation oncology facility.

“These will be dedicated family-style accommodation facilities, available specifically to patients who travel from the North-West Coast,” he said.

“Radiation oncology treatment is normally delivered over a six week period, so having this accommodation available will make a big difference for patients who currently have to travel back and forth everyday.”

Mr Sidebottom said funding for these projects had been assisted with the funds previously proposed for a Medicare-eligible MRI unit on the North-West Coast.

“An exhaustive application process has been unable to find a suitable or viable operator of an MRI business on the Coast, which means this process cannot proceed,” he said.

Mr Sidebottom said Tasmania was already serviced by four Medicare-eligible MRI units (two in Launceston and two in Hobart).

“In population terms, our State has better access to Medicare-eligible MRI units than most other States and Territories,” he said.

“Given the difficulties involved with the MRI licence process, I support funding being re-directed into services that will be of greater benefit to North-West patients.”

Mr Sidebottom has also welcomed tonight’s announcement of a \$134m package of measures to tackle shortages of doctors and health workers in Australia’s rural and remote communities, including the North-West and West Coasts of Tasmania.

“Attracting doctors and health workers to the North-West Coast has been very difficult in the past so I welcome this package which will bring many benefits to our region,” he said.

The package will introduce incentives based on the principle of “the more remote you go, the greater the reward” to encourage doctors to work in rural and remote communities, like North-West Tasmania.

The Rudd Government will also provide an additional \$7.6m over three years to support the introduction of a new formula for funding the Divisions of General Practice network across Australia.

“The North-West Division of General Practice will benefit from a boost in base funding from the new formula, which better recognises local population growth and the demographics of North-West Tasmania,” he said.

Mr Sidebottom said while he had lobbied hard to have a \$7.7m oncology unit placed on the North-West Coast, he accepted the argument that it was too difficult to attract sufficiently trained personnel and the complementary equipment and associated services needed to make it viable.

“In 2007 Kevin Rudd committed \$7.7m for an oncology unit for Northern Tasmania, with the preference for the North-West Coast,” Mr Sidebottom said.

“The Federal Minister for Health Nicola Roxon has announced tonight that the unit will be delivered to the Launceston General Hospital.

“I understand people in our region will be disappointed by this announcement, but it is the view of the State Government, the Tasmanian Cancer Council and the North West Area Health Service that a lack of complementary services in North-West hospitals will not allow it to be viable.

“I believe the funding will benefit more patients by adding to and complementing the existing oncology services in Launceston.”

“I acknowledge it is hard for patients travelling from the North-West Coast but understand that it is more important that they access the very best services possible rather than seek to duplicate these with no real prospect of them being viable into the future.

“I’m confident that the improvements to accommodation and existing cancer services on the North-West Coast announced tonight will provide better health outcomes for cancer patients in our region.

For more information:

Eliza Young

0439 342 159