

This briefing outlines measures announced in the Australian Government's 2019-20 Budget, particularly those measures that are relevant to HIV, other BBVs and STIs and affected communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. The briefing draws on material from Treasury papers, the Department of Health Budget lock-up, information released in Portfolio Budget Statements by the Department of Health and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and analysis by non-government health, welfare and development peak organisations.

Key points

- \$45.4 million investment in HIV, other blood borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with the stated aim of building upon the work being done to improve knowledge and awareness of STIs and BBVs among at-risk groups, health professionals and the wider community.
- \$736.6 million investment in mental health services, of which \$461.1 million will be dedicated to a youth mental health and suicide prevention plan.
- The Government has re-committed to funding all medicines recommended by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC).
- From 2019-20 indexation will be re-introduced to all remaining general practitioner (GP) services on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).
- The My Health Record system will receive an investment of \$200 million to enable the system to progress.
- \$189.1 million investment in a new Whole-of-Government Drug Strategy package.
- The freeze on indexation on overseas development assistance will be removed from 2022-23.
- The Government will increase Australia's diplomatic presence in the Pacific through the creation of five new missions (Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Palau and the Republic of Marshall Islands).

Summary

The 2019-20 Budget will deliver \$104 billion in overall investment, \$435 billion over four years, with a stated focus on guaranteeing Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), supporting hospitals, prioritising mental health, preventative health and sport, and investing in medical research.

The budget statements identify the proposed allocation of resources to support the Government to achieve its policy agenda. The Budget expenditure is approved once the Appropriation Bill is passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate, which occurred on 3 April 2019. To be clear, this means the \$45.4 million investment in HIV, other BBVs and STIs is now secured.

The Australian Labor Party has made an additional commitment of \$39m to virtually eliminate HIV transmission in Australia if elected at the forthcoming federal election.

Domestic

National BBV and STI Strategies

The Government has made a substantial investment to support the implementation of the 2018-22 National BBV and

STI Strategies to reduce transmission and improve diagnosis and treatment. The investment over four years comes to \$45.4 million. \$20 million is new investment from the Department of Treasury and \$25 million is from savings identified within the existing Department of Health budget.

The funding will enable a coordinated national response from partners including community and clinical partners and professional organisations to implement and monitor progress against the forthcoming Implementation Plan for the National BBV and STI Strategies 2018-2022.

The investment includes \$20 million for the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBV and STI Strategy, and \$25m for the implementation of the National HIV, STI, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C Strategies. Of the \$25m, \$5m was announced by the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, at the 2018 World AIDS Day Breakfast. The remaining \$20m is new funding that builds overall investment in BBVs and STIs. It is comprised of \$10m over two years for a national STI television campaign to build awareness of HIV and STIs and \$10m for disease surveillance and BBV and STI prevention, testing and treatment programs.

This is the largest new investment in BBV and STI programs announced in more than two decades.

The new investment recognises the urgent need for greater investment in HIV, other BBVs and STIs. The economic case for investment in prevention and early intervention across BBVs and STIs is strong and acknowledges the public health gains in infections averted and avoided morbidity. The Government's announcement will substantially strengthen the national effort to address BBVs and STIs.

Funding for the implementation of these Strategies is located within the Health Protection and Emergency Response Program with almost \$142 million set aside for 2018-19.

Impact: This investment will increase national prevention, testing, treatment, research and workforce capacity to achieve the goals of the National Strategies. This investment will also support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to lead and develop culturally appropriate HIV and STI education, prevention, treatment, care and support programs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

The Government has stated in the 2019-20 Budget that improving Indigenous health remains a key target of the Closing the Gap framework. Funding for this initiative has been boosted to \$4.1 billion from 2019-20 to 2022-23. \$20 million of the investment in the National BBV and STI Strategies has also been allocated to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy.

\$160 million has also been allocated to the Indigenous Health Research Fund, which will focus on applied and accelerated research to deliver improvements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Work will be focused around healthy start to life, enhancing primary healthcare, avoiding preventable deafness and blindness, overcoming the origins of inequality, reducing the burden of disease, and critical and emerging priorities. The Lowitja Institute, Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research will receive \$10 million over three years to continue work to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people through research.

Impact: This investment enhances existing efforts to reduce the gap in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

Mental Health Funding

Mental health was a clear priority in this Budget with the Government committing to an additional \$736.6 million investment in mental health services, of which \$461.1 million will be dedicated to a youth mental health and suicide

prevention plan. \$263 million is being invested to reduce waiting lists for headspace centres, as well as expanding the headspace network with 30 additional sites, meaning there will now be 145 headspace locations to support people aged 12-25 years. \$110 million will also be invested to extend early psychosis youth services for two more years.

\$15 million will also be invested in Indigenous Suicide Prevention, including \$5 million for young Indigenous leaders to participate in place-based cultural programs. The Government has also committed to investing \$114.5 million over five years for a trial of adult mental health centres in eight locations around Australia. This trial will commence in 2020-21 and will provide walk-in, coordinated care and advice for anyone with concerns, and will address what is seen by many as a missing gap in the system.

Impact: Enhanced investment in mental health is vital to address poor mental health in the community. AFAO hopes that this investment recognises the intersection between mental health and HIV status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and that it includes targeted, community-informed programs, campaigns and strategies to address the effects of stigma and trauma related to HIV, SOGIESC and race on poor mental health.

Funding the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

The Government has re-committed to funding all medicines recommended by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). The Government will provide \$331 million in funding for new and amended medicine listings on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) over five years. Since the 2018-19 Mid-Year Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), the PBS has had five new and amended listings.

Impact: This commitment will ensure that new HIV treatments and biomedical HIV prevention methods will be funded on the PBS, if recommended by PBAC, and that those already approved (such as PrEP and effective treatment) will continue to be subsidised through the PBS.

Medical Consultation Costs

The Government will invest \$187.2 million over four years from 2019-20 to re-introduce indexation to all remaining GP services on the MBS. The Government will also provide \$7.2 million over three years from 2019-20 to increase the availability of information on medical out-of-pocket costs.

Impact: These investments aim to reduce pressure on out-of-pocket GP and specialist consultation costs. Re-introducing indexation should encourage more GPs to bulk-bill appointments and reduce upward pressure on out-of-pocket expenses. This will provide people with easier access to healthcare services for BBV and STI testing, prevention services and care, support and treatment for people with HIV.

My Health Record

The Government will provide an additional \$200 million in 2019-20 to continue the My Health Record system. The My Health Record system allows individuals to control and track their medical history and treatments, such as medical tests, use of medicines and vaccinations. However, there has been concern expressed by the community around the privacy, confidentiality, accessibility and security of personal medical information.

Impact: While there is little detail about where this money will be spent, continued investment in the My Health Record system should support the Australian Digital Health Agency to work with communities to address concerns about security of data and confidentiality of personal records and ensure the positive gains from My Health Record are able to be realised.

Drug and Alcohol Treatment

\$189.1 million in funding for a new Whole-of-Government Drug Strategy package was announced as part of the Budget. The largest component of the new Drug Strategy initiative announced was \$153.3 million for a National Ice Action Strategy. Also included in the funding was \$10.5 million for rehabilitation services, \$9.6 million for increasing services in rural, regional and remote areas, and \$4.3 million for local family drug support. \$4.3 million was allocated to reducing prescription opioid use through better access to pain management services and \$7.2 million was allocated to subsidising take home naloxone through the PBS.

Impact: This investment will support the development of vital harm reduction measures for people who use alcohol, prescription drugs and other drugs. AFAO hopes this investment will improve the availability of alcohol and other drug services in the community and custodial settings and that the development and implementation of new programs associated with this funding is conducted in consultation with our member, the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL).

Medical Research

The Government is committing to a new \$5 billion ten-year Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) investment plan. The ten-year MRFF investment plan spans across four themes of patients, researchers, missions and translation. Under the patients' theme, the government will invest \$614 million in the rare cancers, rare diseases clinical trial program providing investment in breakthrough emerging technologies and treatments, more than doubling funding for MRFF fellowships, and providing record funding for critical research infrastructure. Of note, \$261 million funding is for Preventative and Public Health Research and \$28 million is to address Antimicrobial Resistance and Drug Resistant Tuberculosis.

The Government will provide \$3.5 billion to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and \$0.5 billion for the Biotechnology Translation Fund.

Impact: This investment will support research and investment in emerging technology to improve testing, treatment and prevention of communicable illnesses and to understand and address antimicrobial resistance. It will also ensure that Australia's HIV response is informed by high-quality multi-disciplinary research and will create opportunities for new social, behavioural, epidemiological, clinical and basic research to better understand priority populations in the National Strategies and to strengthen health systems.

Foreign Affairs

Australian Aid

The Government has committed to removing the freeze on indexation of overseas development assistance from 2022-23. This measure means that overseas aid in the final year of the budget will be consistent with inflation. In real terms, however, this represents a continuation in Australia's cuts to overseas aid for the medium-term.

Impact: This pattern of disinvestment jeopardises the sustainability of critical health and other programs, already subject to severe cuts, and erodes Australia's authority as a regional leader and partner.

Asia and the Pacific

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Budget Statements identify the Indo-Pacific region as the focus of Australia's development investment to "continue...the region's prosperity, security and stability by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction."

Impact: The government's initiative to 'step-up' Australia's diplomatic presence in the Pacific through the creation of five new missions (Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Palau and the Republic of Marshall Islands) is noted and will support projects announced in the budget to improve telecommunications, energy, transport and water in these countries. These initiatives come at the expense of aid funding to East and South Asia, with Cambodia and Indonesia experiencing decreases in aid funding by 17% and 10%, respectively.

International Rules and Institutions

The Government has committed to acknowledging and promoting international Rules and Institutions to support cooperation on global issues. This is an important measure that supports respect for international rules, best practice and norms. Respect for international rules creates a global environment of shared responsibility to invest in technology and resources to progress efforts to meet agreed targets on health and human rights.

Impact: This acknowledgement sends a signal to the global community that Australia will honour strategic regional and global interests that are codified in treaties and international agreements. An example of this are the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which include ending communicable illnesses by 2030.