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VIC: Hospitals shortchanged under Vic govt plan

By Melissa Jenkins

MELBOURNE, April 4 AAP - The Victorian government plans to short-change the Monash Children's Centre by $190 million, Labor says documents it has obtained reveal.

But the government argues it will meet all of its health commitments.

The draft health policy, prepared by the coalition before the state election but never released, shows the now government's policy is to underfund four hospitals - the Monash Children's Centre, Royal Eye and Ear Hospital, Box Hill Hospital and Bendigo Hospital - by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Labor says the draft coalition health plan was left in the offices of the former opposition after the election.

Premier Ted Baillieu says he has not seen the draft health plan and doubts the documents were left behind by the coalition during the swap from opposition to government.

"When you're in opposition you have lots of ideas and you work through them," he told reporters.

During the campaign, the coalition promised to match Labor's $250 million promise to build the Monash Children's Centre in Clayton.

But the health plan shows the government intends to spend only $60 million on the centre over the next four years.

There would still be $190 million left in remaining expenditure as of July 2015.

Last November, the coalition also committed an extra $40 million to the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment in Melbourne's east, on top of the $407.5 million promised by Labor.

The draft documents say the coalition plans to spend only $20 million on the hospital in its first term.

Only $21 million is earmarked for the Bendigo Hospital over the next four years, leaving $81 million to spend, while just $40 million of the $160 million needed to upgrade the Royal Eye and Ear Hospital has been allocated.

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews says Mr Baillieu and Health Minister David Davis owe Victorians an explanation.

"This is not a plan, it's a litany, a merry-go-round of black holes, fudge and frauds," he told reporters on Monday.

"These sketchy and, I think, very much underdone health plans, which they had hoped to keep secret, are now out there for everyone to see and they speak volumes."

The coalition has committed to spending $60 million on the Monash Children's Centre over the next four years and to provide the remaining $190 million in its second term.

"We made all of our commitments very clear and they were tied to the Health and Hospital Infrastructure Fund, which is over two terms," Mr Baillieu said.

The Monash Children's Centre would service more than 330,000 children living in Melbourne's southeastern growth corridor.

AAP mj/cdh
VIC: Olivia's cancer centre gets Vic govt funds

By Megan Neil

MELBOURNE, April 4 AAP - Olivia Newton-John's dream of a completed Melbourne cancer centre will become a reality, and both sides of Victorian politics are trying to take the credit.

The fate of the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre had been uncertain, with the new Victorian government last month saying there was a "black hole" in funding the project.

Premier Ted Baillieu has now found the $44.88 million to fund the full fit-out of the centre, including its research facilities, while blaming the former Labor government for leaving behind many project black holes.

Mr Baillieu said it was extraordinary that Labor started a hospital without a funding commitment to complete it.

"Without this additional funding, this hospital would have just been a shell," Mr Baillieu told reporters on Monday.

But Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews was spinning it another way, saying Mr Baillieu had bowed to pressure to provide the final funding.

He rejected suggestions Labor left behind a black hole saying it had provided about $100 million while in government to fund the centre's initial stages, and committed funds for the third stage in the lead-up to the November state election.

"For Mr Baillieu to try and spin it that, because it hadn't been done under our term in office, despite the fact that we had committed to it and had a funded and costed plan, to call that a black hole is just an absolute nonsense."

Treasurer Kim Wells did not detail where the government was able to find the $45 million to fund the centre's fitout, saying it was part of a continuing budget process.

Mr Baillieu said the announcement was made before the May budget so work could continue at the site at the Austin Hospital and the project could be completed on time, by March 2013.

For her part, Newton-John was thrilled the government had found a way to deliver the final funding.

"We are going to provide Victorians with a state of the art, world-class facility that will help and heal the lives of so many," she said in a statement.

Newton-John serenaded then premier John Brumby when Labor made its election commitment with the songstress and breast-cancer survivor, saying the completed centre would be a dream come true after seven years of fundraising.

Mr Baillieu defended the coalition's decision not to match the funding commitment during the campaign.

"We've never had a problem with the Olivia Newton-John cancer centre. But the funding to fit it out was not committed by the previous government."

About 2000 Victorians are expected to receive treatment at the centre, which is due to open by April 2013.

AAP mn/pmu/dep/dep
Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu said yesterday that the state government would allocate $45 million in the May budget to finish the construction of a cancer centre named after entertainer Olivia Newton-John at Melbourne’s Austin Hospital. Appeal committee chairman Andrew Hagger said hospital staff, cancer sufferers and the appeal team were all pleased with the decision. During the election campaign last year, the Labor Party had pledged to fund the final stage of the centre’s construction, but the Coalition did not make the same commitment. There were concerns for the centre’s future especially when the Baillieu government said that money would be hard to find to complete the centre. However, Mr Baillieu said the government had decided to act “responsibly and fix the problem.”

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MENTIONS:
KAREN DEARNE
E-HEALTH

Funding winners face more hurdles

SUCCESSFUL bidders in the $55 million funding round for e-health projects are bracing for further scrutiny as officials recast the “second wave” sites as trials rather than implementations.

Software vendors and project partners were surprised to learn each of the nine projects announced by Health Minister Nicola Roxon last week will be given $100,000 — and a week to prepare more detailed presentations for approval.

The news came during a roundtable on the personally controlled e-health record (PCEHR) organised by Health and the National e-Health Transition Authority (NEHTA), attended by more than 200 consumer, industry, clinical and government representatives.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon announced seven state-based projects

Continued on Page 29

The Australian understands the winning bidders were told that any presentations not considered up to scratch could lead to the project being dropped and another shortlisted candidate brought in.

PCEHR head Andrew Howard and clinical leader Mukesh Haikerwal referred to the projects as “testbeds”.

Ms Roxon announced seven state-based projects and each for the government-owned health insurer Medibank Private and the government-funded Pharmacy Guild last Tuesday.

The second wave of funding is intended to produce followers of the three lead sites — GP Partners in Brisbane, GP Access in the NSW Hunter Valley and Melbourne East — which have already received $14.5m in funding. It is understood many of the 80-odd other bidders were disappointed the $55m had gone to familiar faces, instead of to community-based, aged care and private-public sector proposals.

The successful bidders include the Guild’s FRED IT software and Precedence Health Care, Smart Health Solutions, Emerging Systems and Trilogy Information.

The ACT Calvary Hospital project will also involve iSoft, HCN and HealthLink.

Hurdles for funding winners

Continued from Page 29

firm, former HealthConnect trial sites in the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Brisbane, a NSW pilot site for the abandoned HealtheLink project and three leading hospitals.

Ms Roxon said Brisbane would become an “e-health super site” with the GP divisions of Brisbane South and Ipswich/West Moreton aligning with the GP Partners lead site.

E-health providers named in the grants documents include Precedence Health Care, Smart Health Solutions, Emerging Systems and Trilogy Information.

The ACT Calvary Hospital project will also involve iSoft, HCN and HealthLink.
Hospital sued over bed injury

Sophie Elsworth

A BRISBANE mother is suing Mater Mothers’ Private Hospital claiming she suffered extensive injuries after a nurse incorrectly adjusted her bed, causing it to flip back.

Emma Kelie Box, 42, of Coorparoo on Brisbane’s southside, has lodged documents in the Brisbane Supreme Court for damages totalling $845,998 after claims an electric bed she was lying on was incorrectly adjusted while she was in hospital.

The documents lodged with the court state Ms Box underwent a caesarean section on May 12, 2008, and was confined to a bed after the surgical procedure.

The following day, a nurse entered her room and adjusted the bed to an inclined position while she was lying on her back and feeding her newborn child.

The child was then moved to a crib.

The documents claim the nurse told Ms Box she would assist her to have a shower and rearranged her bed with a red lever which caused the “backrest to suddenly, unexpectedly and rapidly drop to a horizontal position”.

The plaintiff claims her upper torso and head fell backwards to a horizontal position and without warning.

In the documents, Ms Box claims the nurse, through whom the hospital is vicariously liable, was “unfamiliar” with operating the bed controls, failed to consult the operation manual of the bed and failed to seek assistance of other staff to operate the bed.

Ms Box says she sustained many injuries including soft tissue damage to the cervical spine, cervical disc protrusion, abdominal injury, emotional after-effects, shock and anxiety.

Ms Box said she has sustained many injuries... emotional after-effects, shock and anxiety.

The documents state that after the incident, Ms Box remained an in-patient at the hospital for a further five days, but was re-admitted on May 21, 2008 and underwent medical treatment including physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

Ms Box claims that, as a result of the injuries, she continues to require medication and medical treatment, including ongoing physiotherapy and occupational rehabilitation.

“The plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer and experience pain, inconvenience, discomfort and restriction of movement and her working ability and capacity to earn an income has been diminished and impaired,” the documents state.

Mater Health Services would not comment on the matter when contacted.

A defence has yet to be filed.
Vive le Ramsay

RAMSAY Health Care’s French subsidiary has made its first acquisition since coming under control of the Australian health care group last year. Ramsay Santé will acquire the Clinique Convert Hospital for $20.6 million.
DAVID KILLICK

ADDITIONS to cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines, cocaine, LSD and alcohol drove a young man to defraud Medibank Private of more than $6000, a court has heard.

Brendon John Robson Harre, 28, processed bogus medical insurance refunds in his own name for dental procedures that never took place.

Harre, who now lives in St Kilda in Victoria, yesterday pleaded guilty in the Supreme Court in Hobart to 24 counts of computer-related fraud.

The court was told Harre made the claims via the Hicaps computer system while working as the practice manager of a Macquarie St dental surgery between 2004 and 2006.

He claimed for more than $20,000 worth of work, including crowns, root canal therapy and tooth removal, earning rebates from his insurer of up to $800 a time.

Harre’s crimes were uncovered after he took a day off sick and his employer noticed the fraudulent claims. He was sacked the next day.

Crown prosecutor Yolanda Prenc said Harre moved to Queensland and carried out similar crimes to the value of more than $4000.

Defence lawyer Peter Warmbrunn said his client was at a low point in his life at the time, having turned to drugs to ease the pain of a failed relationship.

But he had since rehabilitated himself and now touched nothing stronger than light beer, he said.

Being caught had been a turning point in his life, Mr Warmbrunn said, and his client was now a respected training manager at the Victorian Asthma Foundation.

“He said that if he had not been charged with the Queensland matters, given the level of his drug use he would have been dead by now,” he said.

Passing sentence, Justice Helen Wood said she was satisfied that Harre had turned his life around since he committed the crimes.

She imposed a six-month suspended jail term on condition he be of good behaviour for two years, and ordered he pay $700 in victims of crime levies and $6123 in compensation to the health fund.

PAIN: Brendon Harre’s computer fraud.
VICTORIAN businesses are demanding a sweeping overhaul of the state tax regime to lift competitiveness, warning it will be needed to fend off a New South Wales government push to poach business, investment and major events.

But in a sign that the Coalition could be set to run foul of Victoria’s powerful business lobby, Premier Ted Baillieu has delivered his strongest hint that there is little room left in the budget for spending or tax cuts beyond election commitments.

The Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s submission to the May 3 budget urges the government to cut payroll and land taxes, lower WorkCover premiums, and freeze increases to fees, fines and charges for two years.

It also calls for a sweeping review of Victoria’s small business tax regime and an end to a controversial business tax on car registration.

The demands come amid growing anxiety about the potential impact of cuts in the budget, an end to federal stimulus spending and an aggressive push by the newly elected NSW government of Barry O’Farrell.

VECCI chief economist Stephen Wojtkiw said the state government should recognise that it was “game on” in a battle between Victoria and NSW.

“NSW is going to enter into a new era with a much more proactive government that is going to want to restore NSW’s stature as a place to invest and work and live, and with that will come fairly strong commitments to lower business costs and to attract investment,” he said.

This put pressure on Victoria to show it was “the place to be the chosen destination for expansion or relocation of firms”.

Asked about potential for business tax cuts, a spokeswoman for Treasurer Kim Wells said Labor had left behind massive black holes, which had been exacerbated by Canberra taking $2.5 billion in GST revenue from Victoria.

Mr Baillieu hinted Victoria could be facing one of its tightest budgets for years. “We’ve got the challenge of the $2.5 billion that has been withdrawn, we’ve got the challenge of funds that have to be supplied to deal with the floods, we’ve got capital projects which are overdue and under-budget, we’ve got programs not funded,” he said.

Despite that, the Coalition has scraped an extra $45 million out of the budget to complete the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre.

The future of the centre was under a cloud after the state government last month accused Labor failing to fund the final stage in the 2010 budget. During the election Labor promised to provide the money, a commitment the Coalition did not match.

But yesterday Mr Baillieu said he had found the money needed to fit out the clinical and research components of the centre.

“Without this additional funding this hospital would have just been a shell,” he said.

Olivia Newton-John said she was “absolutely thrilled the government had found the funding”.

“We are going to provide Victorians with a state-of-the-art, world-class facility that will help and heal the lives of so many.”