

7 October 2020

Federal Budget 2020-21 and rare disease

On Tuesday evening, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, announced the Morrison Government's 2020-21 Federal Budget. As the peak body for Australians living with a rare disease, Rare Voices Australia (RVA) attended the Department of Health's Portfolio Briefing webinar presentation and Q&A with the Hon Greg Hunt MP (Minister for Health); Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck (Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians, Minister for Youth and Sport); and the Hon Mark Coulton MP (Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government). The session was facilitated by Professor Brendan Murphy, the Secretary of the Department of Health.

Below, RVA has highlighted areas of the Federal Budget 2020-21 that we believe are most relevant to the rare disease sector.

Improving access to medicines and the PBS New Medicines Funding Guarantee

The 2020-21 Budget commits \$1.9b for life-saving medicines over four years. The Morrison Government will guarantee the listing of all medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) that receive a positive recommendation from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC).

Additionally, the creation of the PBS New Medicines Funding Guarantee (the Guarantee) will provide new funding for the listing of new medicines. In the Q&A session facilitated on Budget night, Minister Hunt said the Guarantee will provide Australians with "certainty, security and stability" and ensures that the listing of new medicines will never again be at risk. This systemic change delivers new funding each year for the listing of medicines on the PBS, to be replenished each year to meet the expected cost of new and amended listings. RVA is cautiously optimistic that these funding commitments will help Australians living with a rare disease to access new and innovative medicines.

Guaranteeing Medicare and investment in telehealth

The Morrison Government is increasing Medicare funding by \$6b over the forward estimates with a \$2.4b investment to extend telehealth services to March 2021. Another \$18.6m has been pledged to support ongoing telehealth. In the Q&A session facilitated on Budget night, Minister Hunt described the expansion of telehealth as a "revolution in the delivery of primary care." RVA welcomes the Government's ongoing commitment as the Action Plan calls for the increased utilisation of digital health, including telehealth, which will increase equity of access to services for people living with a rare disease.

Medical Research Future Fund

RVA welcomes the Government's commitment to continuing to fund all existing programs under the \$5b 10-year Investment Plan for the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). While further detail is yet to be released, we were pleased to hear Minister Hunt refer to the Rare Cancers, Rare Diseases and Unmet Need Clinical Trials in the Q&A session. RVA will continue to advocate for MRFF investment into rare diseases.

Reforming private health insurance

RVA welcomes reform to private health insurance that will see insurers being able to increase the age of dependants (from 24 to 31-years-old) and to allow people living with a disability to remain on their family policy. This allows for better care and support for Australians living with a rare disease.

Mental health supports

The Budget dedicates \$5.7b for mental health. The Action Plan calls for the integration of mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing, into rare disease care and support. Australians with a mental health care plan will now be able to access 20 Medicare-funded psychological services (increased from 10 Medicare-funded psychological services). Consultations undertaken in the development of the Action Plan confirm that living with a rare disease does not only impact a person's physical health, it impacts every facet of their life including their mental health.

Investment into preventative health

The Budget cites its National Preventative Health Strategy (the Strategy) as being a major part of its Long Term National Health Plan. It points towards the Strategy being key to improved health outcomes and a sustainable health system. RVA has participated in the National Preventative Health Strategy consultation process and has provided feedback on the National Preventative Health Strategy Consultation Paper.

Priority Populations

The Action Plan acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people living in regional, rural and remote areas as Priority Populations. RVA welcomes the prioritisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in this Budget with \$4b in Indigenous health funding over the next four years. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not necessarily at greater risk of rare diseases, several factors increase the potential impact of rare diseases on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



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Additionally, RVA is pleased to see the Government's strong rural health strategy — we know that where people live can have a significant impact on workforce supply and people's ability to access services.

RVA welcomes the above Budget inclusions and remains committed to working with the Government to highlight the need to progress implementation of the Action Plan. We will continue to advocate in ways that are most likely to be effective and in a manner that is solutions-focused.

Regards,

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With Compliments

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