



Media Release

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STATES SET UP FOR FAILURE ON HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Patients across Australia will suffer as a result of a looming power struggle between the Rudd Government and the States and Territories over the running of public hospitals, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Mathias Cormann said.

“The Federal Government is setting the States and Territories up for failure to justify a misguided push to take over the running of public hospitals at the next Federal election,” Senator Cormann said.

“Over a year ago Kevin Rudd threatened that a Federal Labor Government would take over running our 750 public hospitals, if the States and Territories failed to lift their game by the middle of 2009.

Still today, the Prime Minister’s own website says that:

“if significant progress toward the implementation of the (National Health Care) reforms has not been achieved by mid-2009, the Government will seek a mandate from the Australian people at the following federal election for the Commonwealth to take financial control of Australia’s 750 public hospitals. (emphasis added)

Under questioning in Senate Estimates today officials from the Prime Minister’s Department were still unable to define what ‘significant progress’ meant.

“How will we know whether the States have made sufficient progress according to the Federal Government if there are no clearly specified targets to be met?,” Senator Cormann asked.

Officials were ‘hopeful’ that those targets could be finalised in time for the next COAG meeting due on 17 November 2008.

“Under the Prime Minister’s time table that will leave Australians with just over 6 months to make a judgement whether there has been ‘sufficient progress’ in improving the running of public hospitals. That’s just not serious,” Senator Cormann said.

“This comes at a time when the Rudd Government has just put significant additional pressure on public hospitals through its Medicare Levy Surcharge changes,” he said.

“The Government has just passed legislation that will result in a \$2.5 billion reduction in funding for hospital treatment after half a million Australians have dropped private health cover.

“The Federal Labor Government offered no compensation for the impact of that significant additional pressure on public hospitals, they didn’t even assess it. This is completely reckless.

“The Prime Minister is not interested in fixing health through cooperative federalism. His focus is on setting up the next pre-election attention grabber – a federal take over of public hospitals,” Senator Cormann said.

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