

Budget 2019 – Health

Health Budget Overview

The 2019-20 Budget included a number of measures which will significantly improve outcomes for women with breast cancer including additional funding for breast cancer nurses and diagnostic imaging to detect breast cancer. This will directly benefit the 19,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

With a total of \$6.6 million invested in preventative health over four years, the Budget continued the failure of the Government to properly invest in the underlying drivers of higher health care spending. NFAW continues to call for the re-establishment of a National Preventative Healthcare Agency to inform cost effective preventative health interventions.

NFAW welcomes the end of the Medicare freeze with the re-introduction of indexation on remaining GP items, but notes that the impact of the freeze continues, and Australians will continue to pay more to visit their GP.

NFAW looks forward to the Government releasing the 2020–30 Women’s Health Policy and call on it to include measurable targets and benchmarks with which to judge progress in meeting women’s health priorities.

WHY IS THIS AN ISSUE FOR WOMEN?

- Women face specific health care needs and without a national women’s health policy these cannot be adequately addressed. Health care research generally focuses on men, despite symptoms often differing between men and women. For example, heart attacks in women can often present with much more subtle symptoms which are easily ignored. The focus on men’s symptoms is a factor which contributes to heart disease being the biggest killer of Australian women.
- Women continue to be negatively affected by the impact of the Medicare freeze which has lowered to Medicare rebate by \$2.50 in real terms. According to the AMA despite the freeze being lifted in the 2018-19 Budget it continues to impact on the affordability of GP visits ([SMH, 2019](#)). Women make up the majority of GP visits with approximately 60 per cent of GP visits made by women and a further 11 per cent by children ([Britt H. et al, 2014](#)) and are disproportionately affected by the lower rebate and higher out of pocket costs.
- Preventative health care is critical for women, with 27 per cent of adult females currently categorised as obese ([AIHW, 2018](#)). This increases the risks of a number of diseases including heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

- Women are more likely to live in poverty than men ([ACOSS, 2018](#)), and therefore socio-economic inequalities disproportionately impact women. Mothers in the lowest socioeconomic areas are 60 per cent more likely to have a low birth weight baby than mothers in the highest socio-economic areas in 2013 ([AIHW, 2017](#)).

BUDGET MEASURES

The following table sets out the priorities identified by NFAW and the relevant 2019 budget commitments.

NFAW priorities	In 2019 budget?	Comment (if any)
Government should develop a new National Women's Health Policy 2020 to address the specific health issues facing women.	Partial	Government should finalise 2020-30 Women's health policy and should include measurable targets and funding.
Government should reverse the Medicare freeze and restore indexation to all Medicare items	Partial	NFAW welcomes the lifting of the Medicare freeze from remaining Medicare items at a cost \$187.2 million over four years, but notes that the impact of the freeze is ongoing, and patients will continue to pay more out of pocket costs to visit the GP.
Government should establish a National Preventative Health Agency to address the rising incidence of chronic disease.	No	The Budget included \$1.1 million for Health Star rating system and \$5.5 million in 2018-19 and 2019-20 for mental health services in areas impacted by natural disasters. Otherwise there was no funding for prevention in the Budget. If Australia is going to tackle the long-term drivers of higher health care costs it must start investing in cost effective and proven prevention strategies – informed by a national preventative health agency.
In accordance with WHO recommendations, Government should review all health policies and programs for their impact health inequality.	No	Australians do not current have equal access to health care with differences across gender, socio-economic background, cultural background and area of residence.
Other budget measures		
Measure	Comment	
The Government will provide \$27.7 million over four years from 2019-20 for an additional 41 breast care nurse positions.	Given that access to a breast care nurse is considered gold standard care, the Government should extend this funding to ensure all Australian women fighting breast cancer have access to a breast care nurse as part of their treatment.	
\$4.0 million over seven years from 2018-19 for The Esther Foundation young women's residential health, development and leadership program to provide counselling to assist with issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health and self-harm.	NFAW welcomes this investment in a successful service assisting women in Western Australia.	

<p>The Government will provide \$308.9 million over five years from 2018-19 for improved access to diagnostic imaging services. This includes subsidise two new items on the Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) for the diagnosis of breast cancer using MRI; and provide access to two new items on the MBS for whole body Fluorodeoxyglucose Positron Emission Tomography for the evaluation of breast cancer.</p>	<p>NFAW welcomes the additional funding for the identification of breast cancer, which will help ensure timely diagnosis and access to treatment for the 19,000 Australian women diagnosed each year.</p>
<p>The Government will provide \$1.1 billion over five years from 2018-19 to support primary care and improve frontline health services for Australians.</p>	<p>The additional investments in primary care are welcomed. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$448.5 million investment in chronic disease management which will improve the care of people with diabetes; \$187.5 million to re-introduce indexation on all remaining GP services; \$12.0 million over three years from 2019-20 to enhance and extend the Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign to raise awareness and counter misinformation to increase rates of vaccination.
<p>\$736.6 million for a range of new program to support the mental health of Australians.</p>	<p>NFAW supports the additional funding includes \$43.9 million for women and families affected by perinatal mental illness.</p>
<p>\$42.5 million in 2018-19 to expand the Community Sport Infrastructure Grants Program.</p>	<p>NFAW welcomes the focus on improving access for women and girls to local sport.</p>