

Chapter Three

MAKING VICTORIANS HEALTHIER

“We need to go beyond treating illness to promoting healthy and active living, which is critical to family well-being and economic strength.”

– Steve Bracks

Labor believes that all Victorians should have access to high quality hospital and community health services where and when they need them. Labor is committed to a strong public hospital system to care for Victorian families.

The challenges:

- Providing for the needs of an ageing population.
- Recruiting a dedicated health workforce and giving them the best possible training.
- Equipping our hospitals with the latest medical technology and expanding them to cope with growing demand.
- Further improving ambulance and rural health services.
- Combat the rising incidence of chronic diseases through preventative health programs.
- The increasing social and personal burden of mental health requires more resources and new approaches.

Labor's achievements

Since 1999, the Bracks Government has:

- Increased funding to our hospitals by 71% and admitted over 1.2 million patients a year (an increase of almost 250,000);
- Employed more than 6,000 extra nurses in the system and more than 1,200 extra doctors;
- Boosted mental health funding by 62%, or \$279 million, with new mental health beds funded for the Maroondah, Box Hill, Austin, Alfred and Latrobe Regional Hospitals;
- Boosted Victorian ambulance services funding by 86%, or \$98 million – providing for more than 650 extra paramedics, 50 extra ambulances and 61 new or upgraded ambulance stations;
- Invested \$2.4 billion in the rebuilding of 50 public hospitals and health services across Victoria; and
- Invested \$258.4 million in upgrading 39 residential aged care facilities, especially in regional Victoria.

Labor's priorities for the future

Labor has set the following goals:

- Achieve an overall improvement in the health of Victorians by focussing on healthier lifestyles and giving people opportunities to self manage their health;
- Reduce waiting times for emergency treatment, elective surgery and dental care – and ensure these services are more accessible in the places where they are most needed;
- Give priority to the wellbeing of young children and achieve overall improvements in their health through coordinated delivery of services; and
- Increase public levels of confidence in health and community services.

BUILDING A STRONGER PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Medicare

3.1 Labor sees Medicare as the heart of a public health system that delivers quality patient care to all Victorians.

Labor is committed to a strong national health care system that provides universal coverage to all Victorians through Medicare and ensures equity of access to publicly-funded services and effective use of public resources.

To deliver the State's responsibilities, Labor will:

- Ensure effective management of public hospitals with increasing capacity to deliver the best possible health care;
- Focus on evidence-based prevention and early intervention services;
- Promote close collaboration and communication between community-based health care providers and hospitals, to ensure continuity of care;
- Encourage empowerment of consumers as partners in their health care;
- Ensure efficient use of information and communication technology to ensure health care information is available when it is needed and to improve the quality of health care through the innovative use of clinical support systems; and
- Encourage strong strategic planning, to ensure appropriate service distribution throughout Victoria.

Labor will promote a cohesive team oriented approach to health care that results in all health workers playing their part to deliver the highest standard of care and support.

An integrated health system

3.2 Labor will seek greater cooperation with the Federal Government and local government to achieve a better allocation of roles and responsibilities in the health care system.

To give priority to reducing duplication and cost-shifting that wastes scarce public resources, Labor will:

- Ensure that Commonwealth and State programs and services complement rather than duplicate each other;
- Provide leadership on national health quality and safety initiatives;
- Seek an aged care funding model focussing on providing care in the most appropriate setting;
- Encourage the Commonwealth Government to enhance access to and quality of general practice, so that public hospital resources are not used inappropriately to provide care that could be provided in other settings; and
- Work with local government in the delivery of health services including the development of local health plans.

Community and consumer participation

3.3 Labor will enable consumers to be active partners in their health care, and communities to participate in health service leadership and planning.

Labor will:

- Advertise appointments to hospital and community health boards widely, and ensure all boards have a strong community perspective;

- Support national initiatives to enhance the role of consumers in health care, such as the '10 tips for safer health care';
- Improve the provision of information to consumers and communities about the quality of and access to health care to enable better community understanding; and
- Improve the availability of interpreters in the public health care system.

Keeping public hospitals publicly managed.

3.4 Labor is committed to the public management and operation of public hospitals.

Labor reiterates its commitment to the public sector and reasserts the legitimacy of public sector employment as a means of delivering quality services to Victorians. Labor's commitment to quality health services will be enhanced by protocols agreed with the relevant union(s). Other than in accordance with agreed protocols, Labor will ensure that there is no further contracting out of health services and over the next term of office will wind back the level of privatisation within our public health system.

Nurses

3.5 Nurses are a key part of the health system and Labor will build on its program to recruit and retain nurses and support them in their work.

Labor's nurse recruitment strategy has been an outstanding success – thousands of additional full time nurses have been recruited into public hospitals. However, the health system continues to experience shortages of qualified nurses in some vital specialties and the Commonwealth Government is not funding enough University nursing places.

To ensure this shortfall is addressed, Labor will:

- Improve training opportunities for Division 2 nurses and pressure the Commonwealth for more undergraduate places and specialist nurse postgraduate programs;
- Support professional development for nurses including post-graduate scholarships for nurses in specialist areas such as critical care, mental health and aged care;
- Address the mental health nursing shortage by developing new approaches to the delivery of education requirements and workforce planning needs; and
- Provide specialist refresher courses, re-entry courses for nurses wishing to return to the workforce and other strategies to attract and retain nurses.

Labor will also:

- Provide adequate resourcing of the nurse back injury prevention project and the no lifting policy in hospitals and health services and promote the policy to consumers; and
- Respond to the issue of violence in nursing and emergency departments and implement the recommendations of the Taskforce on Violence in Nursing.

Training for health workers

3.6 Labor will support greater coordination of training and professional development for the health workforce.

Labor is committed to enhancing the clinical skills and knowledge of best practice care among health workers. Labor will ensure information about training and skills development is accessible for potential and existing health care workers.

Infection control**3.7 Labor will implement further measures to improve infection control in public hospitals, incorporating the full range of evidence-based strategies.**

Priorities will include strategies to improve rates of hand washing through to supporting health care services in their intensive efforts to control multi-resistant bacteria. Hospital acquired infections in all Victorian public hospitals will be monitored through the VICNISS hospital acquired infections surveillance system. Feedback will be provided to health services, with public reporting of performance.

Ambulances**3.8 Labor will ensure the ambulance system provides the best possible access to ambulance services across metropolitan, regional and rural areas.**

Labor will:

- Provide additional ambulance stations, vehicles and officers throughout the State;
- Expand the Community Emergency Response Team initiative to improve response times for Victorians in isolated locations; and
- Ensure Victorian paramedics remain among the best qualified in Australia through developing further clinical education programs.

Application of medical research**3.9 Labor will encourage public hospitals to work with research institutes and universities to translate research into clinical outcomes.**

Victoria has some of Australia's best research infrastructure and scientists and these need continued support.

To maximise the benefits for patients, Labor will:

- Increase investment in medical research in Victoria through new infrastructure and creating opportunities for scientists to participate in leading-edge research; and
- Implement innovative strategic plans for each of our biotechnology research precincts to achieve Victoria's objective of becoming one of the world's top five biotech hubs by 2010.

(See also Chapter 5: Growing Jobs in Victoria - sections 5.29 to 5.36)

COMMUNITY BASED HEALTH SERVICES***Community health*****3.10 Labor will maintain its commitment to community health services, and will strengthen health services provided in local communities.**

Community health services play a key role in ensuring that communities have access to the range of services they need to stay healthy and to live healthier lifestyles, reducing the avoidable use of hospital and medical services.

Labor will:

- Invest in community health services and infrastructure to further the aims and objectives of local community health and to meet efficient operating needs;

- Resource health promotion and the expansion of dental services through community health services;
- Encourage hospitals to work with community health centres to ensure better post-discharge patient management and an improved continuum of care; and
- Encourage bulk-billing GPs to work in partnership with community health centres.

Super Clinics

3.11 Labor will expand the network of Super Clinics to deliver high technology health care services in outer suburban areas.

The Super Clinics will provide a wide range of services including day treatments, diagnosis and other medical services. The clinics will reduce the likelihood of patients with complex needs requiring admission to hospital by providing appropriate sophisticated treatments in a community setting close to where they live.

Dental care

3.12 Until the Commonwealth Government restores federal funding support for dental services, Labor will focus on reducing general dental care waiting times for socially disadvantaged Victorians.

Public dental services are vital to the well-being of Victorians. Following the axing of Commonwealth funding in 1996, dental services have been severely stretched.

Labor will give particular priority to:

- Improving access to dentures for concession card holders;
- Extending funding for pre-school and school dental programs;
- Promoting dental care for pregnant women;
- Promoting fluoridation of water supplies as a public health resource;
- Providing fluoride tablets through Maternal and Child Health to those living in non-fluoridated areas and areas of non-reticulated water;
- Improving access to dental technician training in TAFEs; and
- Expanding the public dental workforce, particularly in rural and regional areas.

AGED CARE

Nursing home care

3.13 Labor will offset the shortage of federally funded nursing home beds by providing additional rehabilitation beds, increasing support services for older people at home and completing the upgrade of state owned nursing homes.

There continues to be a shortage of federally funded nursing home beds that has led to Victoria suffering the most severe shortages of nursing home beds of any state in Australia.

Older people are not getting the care they deserve, and hospital beds are being devoted to their needs when a place in a nursing home would be more appropriate for their care.

Labor will promote programs and services including Home and Community Care that assist older people to continue living in their own homes and enjoying community life.

Addressing the special health needs of older Victorians**3.14 Labor will take a coordinated approach to addressing the diverse needs of older Victorians, including their special health needs.**

Labor will address the health needs of people as they age to promote and maintain good health, mobility and independence for as long as possible.

Labor will:

- Develop specific health promotion programs for older Victorians, in areas such as falls prevention, continence and diabetes education, wound management and arthritis treatment;
- Improve the coordination of services including medical, nursing, and Home and Community Care, to ensure older Victorians receive appropriate care at the right time in the right place;
- Assist older Victorians to access Home and Community Care services by streamlining information to make it easier to understand what services are available;
- Provide culturally appropriate services for ethnic communities; and
- Improve safeguards for the rights of residents of retirement villages.

RURAL HEALTH***Better rural service delivery*****3.15 Labor will give priority to the efficient delivery and coordination of rural and regional health services.**

Labor will:

- Conduct ongoing health planning in rural and regional areas to identify community needs and strategies to address them;
- Improve access to emergency facilities in regional Victoria including road and air ambulance and after hours advice services;
- Improve dedicated health transport services for Victorians needing health treatment;
- Ensure that rural and regional hospitals are adequately supported in the provision of maternity services;
- Provide funds for health services and/or health practitioners to develop innovative models of service delivery to isolated areas; and
- Review rural and regional initiatives undertaken in other states for their suitability for implementation in Victoria.

Staffing in rural areas**3.16 Labor will encourage health professionals to move to rural and regional areas.**

Labor will work with the Federal Government to introduce rural health streams within universities and TAFEs to encourage students to specialise in rural studies. These courses would set aside a percentage of places for students from rural areas.

Labor will:

- Work with health professional bodies and the Federal Government to encourage health professionals to work in rural and regional areas;

- Fund appropriate technologies (e.g. video conferencing) to enable rural and regional health professionals to access the advice, support and expertise of other health professionals;
- Encourage exchange programs between metropolitan and rural and regional health services to enable health professionals to update their skills at the postgraduate level; and
- Explore effective incentives for students to remain working in rural and regional areas after they have completed their training.

Health promotion in rural and regional areas

3.17 Labor will target health promotion efforts to rural and regional areas.

Labor will:

- Implement health promotion strategies to address the inequity of health status among Victorians in rural and regional areas particularly relating to asthma, cardio-vascular disease, farm accidents, road trauma, depression and other mental illnesses and suicide; and
- Expand drug and alcohol services in rural and regional areas to ensure access to the full range of harm minimisation, treatment and rehabilitation services.

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING TO PREVENT ILLNESS

Chronic diseases

3.18 Labor will build on its achievements in disease prevention which include world recognised campaigns on smoking, cancer, sunscreens, HIV/AIDS, alcohol and drug use and the establishment of VicHealth.

Labor will focus on lifestyle factors that contribute to chronic disease, particularly those factors related to nutrition and exercise. Labor will:

- Develop health promotion strategies particularly targeting school aged children;
- Strongly support VicHealth as the major state-wide health promotion organisation;
- Fund community health centres to strengthen health promotion in local communities;
- Support self-management of chronic diseases and chronic mental illnesses through telephone support services;
- Support integrated health promotion program planning, implementation and evaluation; and
- Implement strategies to reduce the economic impact of chronic illness.

Cancer

3.19 Labor will maintain a comprehensive program of measures to prevent, detect and treat the various forms of cancer to reduce the impact of this disease on the community.

Labor will build on the model of its Quit and Sunsmart campaigns to achieve progress against other forms of cancer by implementing preventative measures, initiating early detection and screening programs and boosting resources for treatment in a coordinated fashion across the Victorian health system. The establishment of a new Cancer Agency will enable a more coordinated approach and ensure the early transfer of new research outcomes into hospitals for use in treatment.

Tobacco use**3.20 Labor will increase efforts to discourage tobacco use by Victorians with the aim of cutting the incidence to below 10%.**

Tobacco remains a leading cause of death and disease in Australia. Tobacco kills almost 5,000 Victorians annually and costs Victoria more than \$5 billion each year.

Labor will:

- Implement its legislated bans on smoking in pubs, workplaces and in covered areas of train station platforms, tram and bus shelters and provide smoke free environments for Victorians to enjoy in public places;
- Reinforce existing strategies and implement further reforms to further reduce occupational exposure to smoke; and
- Provide information to parents about the effects of passive smoking on children and further promote smoking cessation programs, especially among pregnant women.

Drug and alcohol abuse**3.21 Labor will extend current programs to reduce drug and alcohol abuse.**

Labor's anti-drugs strategy includes community education, preventing drug use, rehabilitation of alcohol and drug users and law enforcement to control drug trafficking.

Labor will:

- Increase flexibility in the treatment and service system to more effectively respond to new and emerging drug problems;
- Establish education programs and work with young people to address the growing problem of binge-drinking and unsafe levels of drinking among young people;
- Simplify the reporting arrangements between service providers and funding bodies;
- Build on the expertise of the drug treatment workforce by developing training and retraining programs and building career structures; and
- Increase resources to combat organised crime and the drug trade.

HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C**3.22 Labor will build on its strong partnership with the community, treatment and scientific sectors to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.**

HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C remain major problems and Labor will continue education programs to limit the spread of these diseases.

Specifically, Labor will:

- Increase investment in targeted prevention and health promotion activities primarily in areas where there continues to be significant infection, including among prisoners and juveniles in the correctional system;
- Maintain excellent standards in testing, counselling and treatment services; and
- Improve surveillance and research programs.

*Immunisation***3.23 Labor believes that the high level of immunisation among children and adults should be further increased.**

Immunisation is a vital program to enhance the public health and wellbeing of the community. Labor will:

- Increase the flu vaccination rates for people over 65;
- Support immunisation for health care workers;
- Commit to widespread community education programs; and
- Further increase rates of childhood immunisation through targeted follow up programs.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Treatment of mental health is a key priority for the next decade. Labor will ensure mental health services meet their obligations under the *Mental Health Act*, are staffed by a trained and skilled workforce and are more responsive to the needs of consumers and their families.

In recognition of the growing importance of mental health issues in the community, Labor will provide strong and identifiable leadership to ensure a more coordinated response to mental health issues by all areas of government.

Acute and sub-acute mental health care**3.24 Labor will improve the accessibility and quality of acute care, and expand the range of sub-acute care.**

Labor will:

- Expand the availability of 24 hour/7 days per week acute assessment and treatment in both community and emergency department settings;
- Introduce specific initiatives to reduce the time people need to wait for psychiatric interventions in emergency departments;
- Improve the response to people with acute mental illness from inpatient staff and emergency service personnel such as ambulance and police officers through training and improved collaboration at a service delivery level;
- Expand the number of acute mental health beds and implement a bed management system that provides real time state-wide bed status;
- Establish additional Prevention and Recovery Care (PARC) services to enable expanded access to this innovative new 'step up-step down' program; and
- Encourage rural innovations like rooming-in and the use of special care suites in country hospitals to enable a greater geographical spread of services.

Community care**3.25 Labor will support the delivery of better coordinated care to deliver targeted interventions that are multi-dimensional, addressing both presenting issues and the underlying health conditions and social circumstances.**

The increasing recognition of mental health problems and the social and personal burden these impose has led to a higher demand on community health services.

Labor will:

- Provide increased evidence-based psychological and social interventions and improved training and clinical supervision for counsellors;

- Develop more collaborative models of care with related programs such as Drug and Alcohol, Sexual Assault, Gambling and Disability Services;
- Expand counselling services in community mental health services; and
- Actively improve referrals and links to related specialist mental health services, General Practitioners and other health professionals.

Early intervention in mental health

3.26 Labor will pursue early intervention strategies for childhood and adolescent mental health.

Labor will:

- Roll out youth-focused early psychosis programs across the State;
- Fund psychiatric disability, rehabilitation and support services to provide a youth specific program to work in partnership with all clinical early psychosis programs;
- Increase the capacity of child and adolescent services to provide outreach services and collaborative care with other human service agencies such as kindergartens, schools, community health centres and juvenile justice centres;
- Ensure expanded referral, education and training services are provided to maternal and child health nurses for women experiencing postnatal depression, particularly in outer suburban and rural areas; and
- Improve mental health services in correctional facilities and the juvenile justice system.

Dual diagnosis and complex needs

3.27 Labor will improve mental health services for consumers with complex service needs and a dual diagnosis of mental health and drug abuse.

In particular, Labor will:

- Adopt a 'no wrong door' approach by expanding the existing dual diagnosis initiatives to ensure people can receive both mental health and drug and alcohol interventions regardless of which service they initially present to;
- Ensure priority is given to homeless people with complex needs by expanding the innovative collaboration between homeless services, mental health services and drug and alcohol services, to new services in outer suburban and rural areas;
- Establish community-based residential care for consumers with high support needs and improve exit pathways from longer term clinical services by establishing 24 hour psychiatric disability rehabilitation support services offering longer term care; and
- Improve access to mental health services by people in public housing and those with an intellectual disability who are experiencing a mental illness.

Consumer and carer responsiveness

3.28 Labor will improve the responsiveness of staff and the overall mental health system to the needs of consumers and carers.

Labor will:

- Promote through training and clinical support a more family-friendly approach to carers, especially at point of entry to acute services and in inpatient settings, as well as in instances of relapse;
- Ensure all mental health services are able to provide culturally appropriate services to consumers and their families. In particular, the bilingual case manager program will be expanded; and
- Encourage greater mental health representation in the governance of community health services, public hospitals and aged care facilities.

Rights of mental health patients**3.29 Labor will protect the rights of those receiving mental health services.**

Labor will:

- Ensure that mental health services including the non-government, not-for-profit sector, are subject to the full powers of the Office of the Public Advocate, the Health Services Commissioner and the Chief Psychiatrist;
- Ensure that the condition of inpatient facilities meet contemporary standards of physical amenity including access to outside space; and
- Ensure the full range of contemporary evidence-based social and psychological interventions are available in clinical services as well as pharmaceutical interventions.

Accountable mental health services**3.30 In order to bring mental health services up to date with what is expected of general health services, as published in “Your Hospitals Report”, Labor will develop and report on a range of performance indicators in an annual public mental health report.**

The report will include indicators that accurately reflect the performance of each publicly funded mental health services including accountability for funding received in respect to clinical and non-clinical services, implementation of new initiatives and other access and quality measures.

Public provision of public mental health services**3.31 Labor holds that all publicly funded mental health services should be provided by the public and not-for-profit sector.**

Labor will:

- Ensure that no privatisation or contracting out of clinical treatment or disability support services occurs; and
- Ensure mental health services exercising the involuntary provisions of the *Mental Health Act* are public health services and directly accountable to Government for the exercise of such powers.

Mental health workforce**3.32 Labor will place a high priority on mental health workforce issues.**

Labor will:

- Expand undergraduate mental health nursing;
- Extend graduate programs to all mental health disciplines;
- Increase support to overseas trained medical staff, particularly in rural areas;
- Improve support and training for psychiatric disability and rehabilitation service (PDRS) staff, Division 2 nurses, and workers assisting clinical staff such as psychiatric service officers; and
- Adopt further strategies to improve recruitment and retention of clinical staff in rural mental health services.

HEALTHCARE THAT MEETS DIVERSE NEEDS**Women's health**

3.33 Labor believes that women's health needs and concerns often differ from those of men and will actively promote improved women's health within the community.

Labor will:

- Implement and appropriately resource the women's health and wellbeing strategy;
- Consult with Koori women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families on the provision of accessible, flexible and culturally appropriate health services and establish, resource and promote such services;
- Develop a community awareness campaign to encourage women needing assistance with mental health to see trusted general practitioners as their first point of contact;
- Work to ensure mental health issues specific to women are treated so that the symptoms and the cause of the illness are addressed; and
- Encourage greater representation of women across the medical profession.

Accessible and affordable women's health

3.34 Labor believes accessible and affordable women's health services are critical to women's health and wellbeing.

Labor will:

- Provide funding for women-specific health services and clinics across Victoria;
- Review health services in rural areas with the view to increasing access to specialist services for women; and
- Encourage and support access to female doctors e.g. at community health centres.

Eating disorders

3.35 Labor will put in place appropriate support measures for women with eating disorders.

Labor will:

- Ensure appropriate education and counselling services on body image and self esteem for women are available; and
- Implement a state-wide public awareness campaign targeted ~~to~~ at young women addressing eating disorders and promoting a healthy body image.

Maternity and family support services

3.36 Labor will ensure access to high quality maternity and family support services across the State based on the guiding principle that the safety and wellbeing of mothers and babies is paramount.

Labor will:

- Support increased continuity of midwifery care during pregnancy, childbirth, and post-childbirth where practicable;
- Ensure that hospitals develop small multi-disciplinary teams, including a consultant obstetrician, midwives and a neo-natal specialist, to care for women at risk of complications;
- Encourage families, particularly those considered to be at high risk, to attend antenatal classes which cover exercise, nutrition, parenting skills and relationship issues;

- Ensure that breast feeding support is available in public hospitals; and
- Conduct an audit of the discharge planning practices for maternity patients in hospitals and ensure that procedures meet best practice standards and appropriate referrals are made, particularly where a baby has a disability.

3.37 Labor will better co-ordinate home based support services.

Labor will:

- Assess domiciliary midwifery care and ensure that where a hospital is unable to provide visits to the mother's home, the hospital provides the funding to local government, community health or district nursing to provide this service;
- Actively work with local government to ensure Victoria's maternal and child health services (MCH's) are world's best practice based on a commitment to a high quality, free, comprehensive and universal service;
- Extend the MCH telephone advisory service to a widely publicised 24 hour country/city service; and
- Encourage employers and unions to provide workplace-based facilities to enable working mothers to take lactation breaks to express and/or breastfeed their babies.

Reproductive health choices**3.38 Labor believes that women should be supported in their reproductive health choices.**

Reasserting existing policy, Labor will amend section 65 of the Crimes Act to provide that no abortion be criminal when performed by a legally qualified medical practitioner at the request of the woman concerned. *

Labor will implement or enhance the range of programs and services aimed at supporting women through a broad range of their reproductive choices.

To better support women's reproductive choices, Labor will:

- Fund ongoing research to determine the contributing factors to unplanned pregnancies;
- Provide greater social support for women who choose or choose not to continue with their pregnancy;
- Provide equitable access to Assisted Reproductive Technologies to all women; and
- Support the right of women to make their own informed decisions as to their sporting activities during pregnancy without discrimination.

Victorian Labor recognises the recent decision to make the Therapeutic Goods Administration solely responsible for the approval of mifepristone and will urge the Federal Government to now:

- Ensure medical terminations are available to Australian women and that appropriately assessed products such as mifepristone (formerly known as RU486) are made available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;
- Ensure that "morning after" emergency contraception remains easily available, as an "over the counter" pharmacy product for women;
- Increase provision of bulk billing in primary care health services to allow women to more easily access general contraception services; and
- Ensure impartial and independent pregnancy support counselling and pregnancy loss counselling is publicly funded and freely available.

(* Note: consistent with National ALP policy, this matter remains the subject of a conscience vote for all Members of Parliament.)

Men's health

- 3.39 Labor will expand the range of men's health projects focusing on heart disease, prostate, bowel and lung cancer, and death by accidents, violence or suicide. These health issues need to be addressed through health promotion and prevention, improved research and enhanced treatment.**

Labor supports a healthy lifestyles approach to men's health. Men's health issues have emerged as a significant problem leading to reduced life expectancy for men.

Labor will:

- Target ongoing health promotion programs on nutrition and exercise, delivered through the workplace, the education system and community based health services;
- Address prostate cancer as a priority area for treatment, research and social support;
- Provide help with family and relationship issues and mental health issues specific to men;
- Promote healthy body image awareness among young men to address problems such as the increasing use of steroids among some young men; and
- Develop programs designed to address violence, accidents (including programs to reduce farm accidents) and suicide, and to support men in altering violent behaviour.

Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- 3.40 Labor recognises the importance of ensuring full and fair access to community services for culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians.**

Labor will build new services and programs to respond to the particular needs of ethnic communities, including those of recently arrived refugees.

In particular, Labor will:

- Increase access to translation services for hospitals, community health care centres and other health care providers;
- Ensure Home and Community Care funding, and other aged care services are targeted to culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians;
- Increase provision of multicultural mental health services;
- Provide more culturally appropriate health services for women, particularly maternal and child health programs and sexual assault and family violence programs; and
- Seek to prevent the practice of female genital mutilation by working with women from affected communities to develop appropriate community education programs.

Indigenous health services

- 3.41 Labor believes the poor health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians are unacceptable and will give priority to improving outcomes to match those of the rest of the community.**

Achieving significant progress to improve Aboriginal wellbeing requires a commitment to community ownership of health initiatives and a recognition that health issues must be addressed in conjunction with education, employment and housing needs.

Labor will:

- Pursue greater coordination of State and Federal efforts and provide greater flexibility and resources for indigenous health service providers throughout Victoria;
- Take steps to ensure the wider health system and GPs are more responsive to the health needs of Aboriginal people and deliver services in culturally appropriate ways;

- Support the training of Aboriginal health workers at all levels, particularly nurses;
- Pay special attention to the health problems and needs of indigenous people in rural and regional Victoria;
- Use appropriate indigenous health service programs that have been successfully trialled in other states; and
- Further improve indigenous maternal health services to ensure successful pregnancies for mothers and the best possible start in life for Aboriginal children; and
- Include health indicators in the annual Aboriginal Affairs report to Parliament.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender health

3.42 Labor will implement programs recognising the specific health needs of Victoria's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

Labor will:

- Build community capacity to monitor equitable access to health services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people;
- Ensure appropriate awareness and training of health care providers in sexuality issues;
- Promote research on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues; and
- Fund specific projects and services aimed at combating homophobia, preventing youth suicide, improving mental health promotion, preventing drug use, promoting positive ageing, and supporting parents and families of gay and lesbian people.

ETHICAL DECISIONS

Medical treatment

3.43 Labor will support people to choose the most appropriate method and extent of treatment for themselves. *

To provide assistance to those approaching death, Labor will:

- Support campaigns to improve knowledge of the operation of the *Medical Treatment Act*;
- Improve funding for palliative care services across the state; and
- Ensure that Victorians have the right to a say, directly or indirectly, in every decision that affects their lives.

Labor will promote the *Respecting Patient Choices* program which aims to assist individuals understand their treatment options and assist individuals and their families, doctors and other health professionals discuss the individual's preferences about future health care, which may include end of life care.

(* Note: this matter will remain the subject of a conscience vote for all Members of Parliament.)

Biotechnology

3.44 Labor will strongly support medical and biotechnology research and build our capacity to commercialise research outcomes.

Biotechnology has the potential to provide major advances in treatment for chronic diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease and diabetes, and to develop vaccines for malaria and AIDS.

Labor embraces the benefits of biotechnology, particularly in the medical field, but is mindful of the need to proceed cautiously. As with any new technology, the potential social, environmental and economic impacts must be carefully assessed. Labor is concerned that

these new technologies are used appropriately and carefully, subject to comprehensive regulatory arrangements. There are many benefits from new biotechnologies and Victorian scientists are at the forefront in many areas.

Labor will ensure that all research is conducted in line with the Statement of Ethical Principles for Biotechnology in Victoria.

(See also Chapter 5: Growing Jobs in Victoria – sections 5.29 to 5.36)