

**YOUR
INDEPENDENT
FOR MACKELLAR**



VOTE¹ **Dr Sophie SCAMPS**

Evolving Australian healthcare

As a GP, I know firsthand the importance of meeting our community's healthcare needs. Our mental and physical health impacts everything we do – our quality of life, our capacity to work, our financial security and our families.

It is essential that we have accessible, equitable, best-practice healthcare that is responsive to our needs and a health system best prepared, resilient and well-resourced for future health challenges.

However, the pandemic has put even more pressure on an already stretched and underfunded public hospital system and dedicated healthcare workforce; and Australians spend just under \$30 billion a year on out-of-pocket healthcare costs.¹ Chronic disease, population growth, an aging population, climate change and future pandemics will continue to increase demand on our healthcare services.

We need to build the capacity of our health, aged care and disability sectors to meet these challenges by evolving healthcare delivery, increasing resources and services in critical areas of need, improving efficiency of existing systems and better supporting and building our healthcare workforce.

I have spoken with many members of the Mackellar community who have told me where they would like to see improvements in health services and support. There is an urgent need for local early intervention mental health and psychiatry services and an inpatient adolescent mental health unit at Northern Beaches Hospital.

We also need to expand access to public outpatient specialist services on the Northern Beaches and ensure there are minimum standards for nurse-to-patient ratios in hospitals across the country. There is a dire need for specialist disability accommodation and disability housing on the Northern Beaches and respite accommodation for carers to connect with services support.

I look forward to working with all levels of government and experts across all sectors to achieve these ambitions for the people of Mackellar by:

- 1. Enhancing pandemic and health emergency planning and responsiveness**
- 2. Preparing and responding to the health impacts of climate change**
- 3. Increasing health system and workforce capacity and support**
- 4. Expanding mental healthcare that is responsive to community needs**
- 5. Improving services and support for people with a disability and their carers**
- 6. Adequately resourcing aged care to support our most vulnerable**

Dr Sophie Scamps
Independent candidate for Mackellar

¹ AIHW, Health Expenditure Australia 2019-20, Dec 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f1284c51-e5b7-4059-a9e3-c6fe061fecdc/Health-expenditure-Australia-2019-20.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

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1. Enhancing pandemic and health emergency planning and responsiveness

As a local GP in Narrabeen, I have seen the impact of the pandemic on my patients and my colleagues across general practice, hospitals, emergency and community services and aged care. People on the Northern Beaches have made many sacrifices throughout the pandemic to help protect our loved ones and the wider community.

When COVID-19 hit Australian shores in March 2020, we weren't prepared. We witnessed policy making on the run, which has resulted in enormous economic, health and wellbeing impacts for all Australians. We have seen a health system and health workforce at breaking point, families disconnected, businesses closed, many permanently, a lack of local supply chains for vital medical supplies and delays in elective surgery. We've also seen waiting times for mental health support on the Northern Beaches blow out and inconsistent public health measures and communications across the country.

The Federal Government dropped the ball on national pandemic training exercises, which have not been run in Australia since Exercise Sustain in 2008.² These were designed to help prepare our country for a global pandemic, testing the health system's capacity and our ability to mitigate the effects of a virus on the Australian community.

Now is the time to learn from the lessons of the current pandemic and apply them to better prepare our health system, our health workforce and our community for the next pandemic and future health threats and emergencies.

As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Undertake a Royal Commission into the Government's handling of the pandemic
- Develop a renewed national plan for future pandemic and health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery processes
- Develop local pandemic planning strategies unique to the needs of the Northern Beaches
- Reinstate national pandemic training programs every two years
- Increase investment in general practice and public hospitals to build capacity to manage future pandemic and health emergencies

² ABC, Australia ran its last national pandemic drill the year the iPhone launched. Did that harm our coronavirus response? April 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-20/coronavirus-australia-ran-its-last-pandemic-exercise-in-2008/12157916>



2. Preparing and responding to the health impacts of climate change

The climate crisis is a health crisis. The World Health Organization has stated that climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity.³ Heat has killed more Australians than any other extreme weather event⁴ and fossil fuel air pollution causes more than 5,000 Australian deaths per year.⁵

There are rising rates of eco anxiety, particularly in children and young people,⁶ which is associated with inadequate government responses to climate change.⁷ The climate crisis worsens health inequities, particularly for our most vulnerable, including young people, the elderly, First Nations communities, the homeless, refugees and people without secure employment.

Bushfires, extreme heat, pollution, floods, droughts, shifts in infectious disease and rising allergens have a costly effect on our health and put added pressure on our healthcare sector, a sector that is already operating at an unsustainable level.

Extreme weather events are having a huge impact on people's mental health, in many instances for years after the events occur. In many communities throughout Australia we've seen clinically diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, depression and suicide increase during the years following such events.⁸

The reality is that Australia is one of the countries on the frontline of climate-health impacts, yet we have no national plan to mitigate and adapt to the impacts. This must urgently change.

As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Support the implementation of a National Climate, Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Take urgent policy and legislative action to address climate change
- Increase funding for research into climate impacts on physical and mental health, and health system preparedness
- Increase the capacity of health services and the healthcare workforce to respond to climate impacts on mental and physical health
- Resource primary care (e.g. PHNs) to develop evidence-based climate and health strategies tailored to the specific needs of their local communities

³ WHO, Factsheet. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

⁴ Doctors for the Environment Australia, Factsheet, 2020. https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DEA-Fact-Sheet_HeatwavesWEB.pdf

⁵ Australian Academy of Science, *Air Pollution - What's the Situation?* <https://www.science.org.au/curious/people-medicine/air-pollution-whats-situation>

⁶ The Lancet, Planetary Health. *Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey*, Dec 2021. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext)

⁷ Young People's Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon, 2021, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3918955

⁸ Doctors for the Environment. Report: How Climate Change Affects Mental Health in Australia, 2021. <https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-How-Climate-Change-Affects-Mental-Health-in-Australia-v3-1.pdf>



3. Increasing health system and workforce capacity and support

Australians rely on an accessible, equitable and well-resourced public health system to look after them in their time of need. And rightly so. Access to timely, quality healthcare is a human right, not a privilege for those who can afford it.

The reality is that in 2019-20, out-of-pocket healthcare expenses cost Australians \$29.8 billion, which accounts for 17 per cent of Australia's total health expenditure and one of the highest proportions in the OECD.^{9¹⁰} Many Australians also forgo or delay care, due to cost, which means more pressure on the health system later when they become sicker.

The pandemic has put pressure on an already stretched and underfunded public hospital system that has faced increased demand due to population growth, an aging population and the burden of chronic disease.¹¹ In addition, a decline in the number of young people with private health insurance is leading to increased reliance on the public health system.^{12^{13¹⁴}} Nationally the number of public hospital beds has not kept up with Australia's ageing and growing population and will continue to decline if not addressed.^{15¹⁶}

Emergency department waiting times have blown out, with ramping of ambulances in Emergency Departments occurring all too frequently, held up while they wait for their patients to be attended to. Already long elective surgery waiting times in public hospitals have been exacerbated due to COVID,¹⁷ many people have found it difficult to access urgent routine treatment for other health conditions.¹⁸

Locally, people in Mackellar have very limited access to public outpatient services on the Northern Beaches. This means in many circumstances only private options are available on the Northern Beaches, which can lead to significant out of pocket expenses. Public outpatient services on the Northern Beaches need to be expanded to ensure the Mackellar community has access to universal public specialist care.

Prior to the pandemic, Australia was already facing a health workforce shortage, with modelling predicting a deficit by 2025 of 109,500 nurses and 2,700 doctors.¹⁹ More than ever, we must better support our healthcare workers and cultivate and retain a future health workforce. This must include growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce to ensure improved health outcomes for our First Nations peoples.

⁹ AIHW, Health Expenditure Australia 2019-20, Dec 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f1284c51-e5b7-4059-a9e3-c6fe061fecdc/Health-expenditure-Australia-2019-20.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

¹⁰ Grattan Institute, *Not so universal How to reduce out-of-pocket healthcare payments*, March 2022. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/not-so-universal-how-to-reduce-out-of-pocket-healthcare-payments/>

¹¹ AMA, *Public Hospitals Cycle of Crisis*, Oct 2021. <https://www.ama.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/Public%20hospitals%20-%20cycle%20of%20crisis.pdf>

¹² AMA, Prescription for Private Health, 2020. <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/ama-prescription-private-health>

¹³ Grattan Institute, *Stopping the death spiral: creating a future for private health*, 2021. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/stopping-the-death-spiral/>

¹⁴ CHF, *What Australia's Health Panel said about private health October 2021*. <https://chf.org.au/private-health-insurance>

¹⁵ AMA, *Public Hospitals Cycle of Crisis*, Oct 2021. <https://www.ama.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/Public%20hospitals%20-%20cycle%20of%20crisis.pdf>

¹⁶ AMA, *Public Hospital Report Card*, November 2021. <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/ama-public-hospital-report-card-2021>

¹⁷ AIHW, *Elective Surgery Activity*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/myhospitals/intersection/activity/eswt>

¹⁸ The Guardian, 'People will die': doctors warn COVID surge is filling up hospitals. Jan 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/03/people-will-die-doctors-warn-covid-surge-is-filling-up-nsw-hospitals>

¹⁹ AHHA, *Health Workforce*, May 2017. https://ahha.asn.au/sites/default/files/docs/policy-issue/ahha_position_statement_-_health_workforce_3.pdf

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Lastly, as the cornerstone of Australia's primary health care and prevention, General Practice must be adequately supported to meet the growing and changing needs of our communities into the future.

As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Increase Commonwealth funding to boost public hospital inpatient acute care and outpatient chronic care capacity
- Expand public outpatient specialist services on the Northern Beaches
- Ensure minimum nurse-to-patient ratios to improve patient safety
- Support nursing staff and midwives to re-train and re-join the workforce after taking a long period of absence (i.e. for parental leave)
- Improve support services and employment conditions for health workers, including a wage increase for nursing and midwifery staff
- Support the recommendations of the 2022 Close the Gap report, including growing the Indigenous workforce
- Support the implementation of the Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032
- Support a Productivity Commission Inquiry into private health insurance



4. Expanding mental healthcare that is responsive to community needs

Australia is experiencing a mental health crisis. Prior to COVID-19, around 16 million Australians aged 16-85 experienced a mental health disorder at some point during their life.²⁰ The pandemic has further impacted our community's mental health, causing psychological distress for many, particularly young people, women, our First Nations and those experiencing mental or physical disabilities, unemployment or financial stress.^{21²²} One in four young Australians had thoughts of suicide during the pandemic.²³

With this rise in mental health issues, has come increased use of mental health services locally and around Australia, with organisations such as Lifeline, Kids Helpline and Beyond Blue experiencing record calls for help.²⁴ On the Northern Beaches, community-based services are doing their best to support those in need but cannot keep up with demand.

Waiting lists for early intervention and psychiatry services, particularly for young people, are over six months long.²⁵ We need to formalise the reporting of waitlists for mental health services to help inform the allocation of resources and to help people get other support while they wait to see a professional.

Many Australians are not getting the mental health care they need due to cost,²⁶ public hospitals do not provide a full range of mental health services, and only certain kinds of care are provided by community-based services. For example, there is no dedicated adolescent inpatient mental health service at Northern Beaches Hospital. The Northern Beaches has a population close to that of Canberra and we do not have a dedicated inpatient mental health service for our youth at our local public hospital. This must change.

We need to improve the efficiency of our mental healthcare system by focusing on prevention and enabling timely and affordable access to mental health services that are tailored to individual needs and person-centred outcomes.

(Policies on the next page.)

²⁰ ABS, *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, 2008. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-survey-mental-health-and-wellbeing-summary-results/latest-release>

²¹ University of Sydney, *Review of COVID and mental health finds hope but growing inequalities*, Oct 2021. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2021/10/07/review-of-covid-mental-health-finds-hope-but-growing-inequalities.html>

²² The Guardian, *Covid's mental health toll: one in five Australians report high levels of psychological distress*, 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/14/covid-19-mental-health-toll-one-in-five-australians-report-high-levels-of-psychological-distress>

²³<https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/urgent-national-priority-pandemic-s-staggering-mental-toll-on-young-australians-20220318-p5a5v0.html>

²⁴ AIHW, *Mental health services in Australia*, February 2022.

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/mental-health-impact-of-covid-19>

²⁵ Daily Telegraph, *Real cost of Covid-19 lockdown: Aussie kids wait nine months as psychiatrists 'burnt out'*, 2021.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/coronavirus/article-971ab704b2641295fdeb/real-cost-covid-lockdown-aussie-kids-wait-nine-months-psychiatrists-burnt-out-news-story_06fb8b30041a971ab704b2641295fdeb

²⁶ Grattan Institute, *Not so universal How to reduce out-of-pocket healthcare payments*, March 2022.

<https://grattan.edu.au/report/not-so-universal-how-to-reduce-out-of-pocket-healthcare-payments/>

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As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Significantly expand the mental health workforce, from peer support workers right through to psychiatrists
- Place a mental health practitioner in every government secondary school
- Establish a National Patient Waitlist system that triages and tracks people from the moment they ask for support to the moment they get it. This system will also provide access to early intervention and support for immediate care
- Scale up smart digital care platforms for young people and adults, to back up primary care and GPs and fill the gap between asking for specialist help and getting it
- Develop alternatives to emergency care for people with mental illness, including clinician-led after-hours services and mobile crisis services
- Enable earlier and increased access to expanded inpatient and community-based mental health services
- Fund a dedicated adolescent inpatient mental health service on the Northern Beaches
- Fund mental health nurses (or other qualified mental health worker) within primary care to support earlier intervention
- Implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's Report into Mental Health²⁷

²⁷ Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Mental Health, June 2020. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>



5. Improving services and support for people with a disability and their carers

One of the key challenges for people with a disability is accessing health services and supports that match their needs.

Despite the recommendations of the 2019 Tune Review, the NDIS is still complex and hard to navigate, particularly for the most disadvantaged members of our community, and many Australians face challenges in accessing funds and services.²⁸²⁹

From my experience as a GP, I can attest to a lack of consultation and communication from the NDIS with GPs to ensure the NDIS best meets the needs of our patients.

Locally, there is a lack of specialist disability accommodation (SDA) and disability housing on the Northern Beaches.³⁰³¹ This is putting families under enormous pressure. Carers spend their lives looking after their loved ones; however they also need a place to connect, recharge and receive support.

As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Ensure people with lived experience of disability inform continued NDIS improvements
- Increase communication and consultation between the NDIS and GPs to better meet client needs
- Increase specialist disability accommodation and disability housing on the Northern Beaches
- Advocate for respite accommodation for carers on the Northern Beaches with wrap-around support to maintain carer wellbeing
- Implement the recommendations of the Tune Review

²⁸ Government News, *NDIS participants strangled by red tape*, August 2021. <https://www.governmentnews.com.au/red-tape-making-ndis-highly-inequitable/>

²⁹<https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers-programs-services-for-people-with-disability-national-disability-insurance-scheme/ndis-legislative-reforms>

³⁰ Northern Beaches Advocate, *Dee Why disability housing*, Mar 2022. <https://www.northernbeachesadvocate.com.au/2022/03/03/dee-why-disability-housing/>

³¹ Northern Beaches Council, *Disability Inclusion Plan 2017-2021*.
https://www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/DIAP_2017_2021_June.pdf



6. Adequately resourcing aged care to support our most vulnerable

In June 2020, 16 per cent or 4.2 million Australians were aged 65 and over. This is forecast to more than double by 2057³², which means increased demand on our aged care system, which was already in crisis before the pandemic.

We have heard devastating stories of abuse, neglect, substandard care and a lack of access to aged care services for our most vulnerable Australians during The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, with the final report stating “Aged care, for too long, has often been treated by the Australian Government as a lower order priority.”³³

The pandemic has also impacted our aged care sector the hardest, with the mental health of aged care residents and staff negatively affected and many aged care facilities facing outbreaks of the virus.³⁴³⁵ COVID has also increased operating costs and led to staffing shortages.

As a GP, it concerns me that aged care residents can experience more limited access to GP care, allied health (including, oral health and mental health) and specialist services. We are facing a shortfall in aged care workers, who currently feel undervalued and are inadequately remunerated.³⁶

Many Australians want to stay in their own home in their old age, however accessing home care can be arduous and difficult to navigate. About 58,000 more carers are needed to meet the planned increase in home care places.³⁷

Aged care reform is now more urgent than ever to ensure older Australians receive the quality care they deserve when they need it.

As the Member for Mackellar I will work to:

- Implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety
- Attract, develop, train and better remunerate our aged care workforce
- Increase funding for research into aged care to better inform aged care practices
- Implement initiatives (for example, an expanded Medical Benefits Schedule) to improve residents' access to specialist and allied health services as part of multidisciplinary care
- Seek funding for primary care nurses in Residential Aged Care Facilities to support GP care
- Expand and develop the home care workforce to meet growing demand

³² AIHW, Older People, Nov 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/population-groups/older-people/overview>

³³ Aged Care Royal Commission Final Report: Summary. March 2021. <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>

³⁴ Macquarie University, *National survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Australian residential aged care residents and staff*, Jan 2022. <https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/national-survey-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-mental-health-of>

³⁵ ABC, *Loved ones of aged care residents are calling for a greater balance between managing COVID-19 risks and mental health*, Jan 2022 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-14/aged-care-residents-omicron-mental-health-lockdowns-booster/100753744>

³⁶ PWC, *Recruiting, retaining and empowering the aged care workforce*, 2021. <https://www.pwc.com.au/health/aged-care-royal-commission/workforce.html>

³⁷ Grattan Institute, *Unfinished business Practical policies for better care at home*, Dec 2021. <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Unfinished-business-Practical-policies-for-better-care-at-home-Grattan-Report.pdf>