



RACGP



Media Release

23 September 2020

STATEMENT OF CONCERN - PROPOSED NEW ACT WICs

Together, our organisations represent, the peak representative bodies for general practice and primary care in the Australian Capital Territory.

Last week's announcement that a re-elected ACT Labor Government would establish a further 5 Walk-in Centres (WIC) and that the first of those would be co-located with the existing National Health Co-operative in Coombs has caused our organisations considerable concern, due to the lack of an open, public and competitive tender process to determine the location.

As a result of this concern that the first WIC location was selectively chosen and announced, we wrote to ACT Labor and a copy of that correspondence is attached. We have received no reply.

For some time, we've known that if we can better integrate care across our health system – from public hospitals, to general practices and on to allied and other healthcare services - better outcomes can be achieved for patients.

At a time when we all should be working towards better integration of care, the allocation of the first of the new WICs – without consultation with Canberra's general practitioners or our organisations – brings with it the risk of further splintering care. We know it is important that, if co-location is to proceed, that the new model of care be developed carefully and cautiously, to avoid unexpected consequences. We are willing to work with a

re-elected ACT Labor Government to develop accessible and sustainable models for any future WICs.

In addition, given the potentially significant commercial benefits flowing to any co-located general practice, it is vital that the new WICs are allocated using a process that is open, public and competitive, ensuring we have a transparent process for expenditure of public money. Otherwise, 'picking winners' risks not only the sustainability of general practices in the surrounding areas, but our community cannot be satisfied that multi-million dollar expenditure of public monies is being undertaken fairly or effectively.

Finally, we know it's a challenge to bring the various parts of the healthcare system closer together and get them working in harmony – particularly in a time of COVID-19. But that's where the big gains lie. ACT Health know this, as do Canberra Health Services, and all of us. GPs know it and, most importantly, so do our patients.

This is why we call upon Chief Minister, Andrew Barr and Health Minister, Rachel Stephen-Smith to make public election commitments to, firstly, an open, public and competitive tender process to allocate the proposed co-located WICs and, secondly, to consult on the new model of care being implemented as part of the proposed WICs.

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Ms Melissa James
Secretary, ACT Labor
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222 City Walk
Canberra ACT 2600

17 September 2020

By email: Melissa.james@act.alp.org.au

Dear Ms James

We refer to ACT Labor's election announcement made earlier this week, to establish 5 new 'Nurse-led Walk In Centres' [WICs] to be located in South Tuggeranong, West Belconnen, Inner South, Molonglo and North Gungahlin. In addition, yesterday ACT Labor has announced, in concert with the National Health Co-operative [NHC], that a 'Pilot Healthcare Facility' will be co-located alongside the existing NHC in Coombs, inclusive of a new model of care.

We also refer to an ABC Radio interview with the NHC Chief Executive Officer, Alison Wright, on ABC Radio Breakfast this morning and a media release by the NHC.

From the materials publicly available, it appears that a location has been selected for the new WIC at the NHC at Coombs, rooms are to be leased from the NHC and possibly other facilities and staff utilised. The total commitment by ACT Labor is said to be \$700,000 over the next term of government.

It is foreshadowed that similar models may be used with regard to the other new WICs.

Given these matters, we are concerned that ACT Labor appears to have selectively chosen – and announced - the NHC as the co-located general practice for the new WIC in Molonglo. In fact, from the strength of the joint announcements today, it may be that contracts have been signed. We sincerely trust that this is not the case but ask that you confirm no contracts have been entered into or commercial commitments made with the NHC.

Given these concerns, we acknowledge that if, re-elected, ACT Labor would have a mandate to proceed with the roll-out of the new WICs. Given the potential and significant commercial

benefit accruing to a general practice co-located with a new WIC (including the NHC), we believe a public tender process is warranted to decide the successful general practice. Consequently, we seek your commitment that open, public, and competitive tender processes will be undertaken to decide which general practices will be successful in gaining a co-located new WIC.

For the avoidance of doubt, we also seek your commitment that the new Molonglo WIC will be put out to tender regardless of today's announcements. In our view, to do otherwise excludes other local, general practices from the opportunity and may not produce the optimal outcome from the expenditure of \$700,000 of taxpayer funds.

Further to this, we wish to signal our willingness to work with a re-elected ACT Labor Government to develop accessible and sustainable models for any future WICs.

Given the current election campaign, we would appreciate a reply to our correspondence by COB 18 September 2020.

Yours sincerely



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