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MEDIA RELEASE

Nurses and Midwives will be hardest hit by proposed cap on education deductions

Key national professional nursing and midwifery organisations emphatically urge the Rudd Government to rethink a proposed $2,000 cap on tax deductions for education expenses incurred by nurses and midwives.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, CEO of Australian College of Nursing warns the Australian Government proposal to introduce a $2,000 cap on deductions for education expenses will impose a major barrier to continuing professional education for nurses and midwives.

"The proposed cap is too low to realistically support continuing education for nurses and midwives and is counterproductive in the context of national health workforce reform, Thoms said.

"Nurses and midwives together make up the largest proportion of the health workforce and the dependence of the health system on our professions cannot be overstated”.

Retention of the nursing and midwifery workforces is a major national health policy priority. It is now widely recognised that even by conservative estimates, the supply of nursing and midwifery services within Australia will soon be outstripped by demand.

"Keeping our nurses and midwives in the health system through stronger professional development support has been identified as a key measure to stem future shortages. We can’t turn away from that now”, advises Kathy Bell, CEO of the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA).

Nurses and midwives must record a minimum of 20 to 40 hours of continuing professional development each year to maintain registration to practise. They work in areas where expertise, knowledge and skills need to be continually updated in order to comply with evidence-based best practice and to deliver safe, quality care. The tax provision to deduct work-related education
expenses is one of the few universally available financial supports available to them.

“We depend on flexible nursing and midwifery workforces to provide care across a range of settings and specialities. This can only be achieved if they are supported in meeting the cost of post graduate education and professional development”, adds Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, CEO of Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

Sarah Stewart, Acting EO of Australian College of Midwives stresses “The proposed cap will have an even greater impact on nurses and midwives working in rural and remote areas where access to continuing professional development is extremely limited and incurs additional costs for travel and accommodation.

“The health system as a whole is dependent upon the investment nurses and midwives make in their own professional development. In an environment where there is increasing strain on the health system and predicted nursing and midwifery workforce shortages, every effort must be made to remove barriers to nurses and midwives undertaking further education”.

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