

Media Release – 12 May 2006

Federal Budget 2006-07: CDNM Response

The Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia & New Zealand) congratulates the Australian Government on its attention to the education of nurses in the Federal Budget. The Chair of the Council, Professor John Daly of the University of Western Sydney, said:

“We welcome the additional numbers and the Government’s commitment to enhancing the nursing workforce nationally. The Government will provide \$93.2 million over four years to provide 1,000 additional higher education nursing places each year. This is a good beginning; clearly some messages about looming shortages, potential crises and a world-wide shortage of registered nurses have been received and acted on. The Council is concerned about the capacity of the current system to accommodate the additional numbers because of systemic constraints, including a dearth of clinical placements for additional numbers of undergraduate students. An urgent audit is needed to ascertain if there may be latent capacity in the health system in some areas. The health system is sometimes slow to respond to requests for additional placements. However we acknowledge that changes in models of care, resources and patient acuity and at times bed closures make the task of acquiring and maintaining an adequate number of quality clinical placements across a range of areas a major and ongoing challenge.

The Budget also provided 420 additional places specifically for mental health nursing for pre-registration courses which can incorporate a major in this field. Most Schools of Nursing have critical shortages of mental health nursing clinical placements, which in some cases will limit capacity to actually take these mental health places. This is an issue for State and Territory governments as well as the Commonwealth. COAG has an agreed plan for this so there should be better co-operation between these governments with these initiatives.

Also it is possible that many Vice-Chancellors will not be interested in bidding for additional nursing places because of the cost of courses and the capped HECS with no capacity to charge students in nursing courses an extra 25%. Clinical education challenges and recruitment of extra students could be problematic for many Schools because of a shortage of qualified applicants. General recurrent funding for universities remains constricted and, in a number of cases, does not match the actual cost of educating RNs”.

“The Council welcomes the additional funding for medical research. Nurses and midwives are competing successfully for ARC and NHMRC grants in growing numbers, but we have inadequate representation on key committees of the bodies. Also a very small part of the health budget is expended on nursing and midwifery research and we have pressing needs to grow our science in order to maximise our contributions to research based nursing and midwifery care and hence the health outcomes for the Australian population.”

“On balance, the CDNM commends the initiatives in the Budget but considers that much remains to be done to strengthen the potential contribution of nurses and midwives to the health and well-being of Australians”.

For all enquiries, please contact Professor John Daly, Chair of CDNM via the CDNM Executive Officer, Jennifer Martin on 03 9244 6111 or by email at jmartin@deakin.edu.au .