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FUNDING FOR HUNTER GP ACCESS AFTER HOURS – JUST ANOTHER ELECTION BAND-AID BY TONY ABBOTT

Tony Abbott’s decision to grant a one year ‘stay of execution’ for the Hunter GP Access After Hours (GPAAH) service is nothing more than a cheap band-aid bid to win the election and does nothing to secure its ongoing future.

A one year reprieve is little comfort for the 240 doctors working in this service and the 85,000 patients who used the GPAAH in the last 12 months. So just what will happen in 2006?

According to Tony Abbott, the one-year extension will give the Government enough time to ‘evaluate’ the after-hours trials currently operating – although the Minister is yet to detail what this evaluation process will entail.

That the Minister even regards the Hunter GPAAH as a trial service is of great concern. We ran a successful trial project years ago in Maitland which led to the setting up of the Hunter GPAAH service.

Now the Hunter GPAAH has become an essential service for the 450,000 people living in the region.

The Howard Government’s promise of \$12.9 million - to be shared by four after hours services in the Hunter, Macarthur (Western Sydney), West Victoria and Tasmania - pales into insignificance compared to Labor’s \$128 million plan to invest in Medicare After Hours.

Labor’s plan for improved access to Medicare services puts patients first, improves access to bulk billing and eases the pressure on public hospital emergency departments. For the sake of the nation’s health we need a Labor government.

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