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HAPPY FIRST BIRTHDAY GP ACCESS AFTER HOURS – BUT WILL IT REACH ITS SECOND BIRTHDAY?

Congratulations to the GP Access After Hours (GPAAH) service for successfully completing its first year of expanded operation in the Newcastle and Hunter region.

After just 12 months of operation, the GPAAH has provided a quality local solution to the problem of accessing health care after hours.

While Sydney patients continue to enjoy generous numbers of bulk-billed consultations, bulk billing rates in this region have plummeted and out-of-pocket expenses for GP visits are steadily increasing.

In the Hunter, the GPAAH has become an essential service having:

- Provided an extra 40, 332 bulk-billed consultations across five clinics
- assisted more than 45,000 people with telephone advice
- delivered more than 500 home visits – all in just one year.

The 230 doctors involved have every right to be proud of these achievements.

Unfortunately, the Minister for Health, Tony Abbott, doesn't value our after hours access service and has refused to commit to future funding beyond this year. The GPAAH may never get to celebrate its second birthday and may face closure in March 2005.

Instead of forcing taxpayers watch their hard earned dollars squandered on advertisements to re-elect the Howard Government, perhaps the Minister could find the cash to fund the second year of the GPAAH service.

Tony Abbott and the Howard government simply can't be trusted with our health.

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