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ABBOTT SHUNS NOVOCASTRIANS' HEALTH CARE - AGAIN!

I welcome the announcement today that some Medicare offices will now open on Saturday mornings, but if Tony Abbott and the Howard Government were serious about providing decent access to health care, they'd commit funding to Newcastle's GP Access After Hours (GPAAH) service.

Federal funding for 5 after-hours medical services across NSW, Queensland and Western Australia has been extended to 30 June 2005. However, Tony Abbott has not committed to funding GPAAH.

Without a commitment of future funding, Newcastle's GPAAH may have to close its doors in March 2005.

Tony Abbott says that after-hours medical services are an "essential part of our health system". The question is, why doesn't the Minister think that GPAAH is an essential service to the people of Newcastle?

I'm sure that the 40, 332 patients in the Hunter who received bulk-billed consultations through GPAAH and the 230 doctors involved in the program would agree that after-hours medical services are vital to the health of the people of Newcastle. Why then won't Tony Abbott and his government commit to funding GPAAH and providing Newcastle with this essential service?

Instead of using taxpayers dollars to fund the Howard government's re-election campaign, why not fund decent health care for all Australians.

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