

100% Independent

JUNE 2020

# THE CLARK INDEPENDENT

ANDREW WILKIE - YOUR INDEPENDENT FEDERAL MP



## Health check

**The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the importance of a well-resourced and competent health system. It's been fabulous to see the system rise to the challenge, with our health workers in particular doing an incredible job. At the same time the pandemic has exposed gaps and deficiencies which governments need to now focus on.**

The long-awaited Royal Hobart Hospital K-Block opened at the height of the pandemic and eased the pressure on the Royal. Andrew secured the \$340m federal contribution in 2010 to kick-start the project. The new capacity could not have come online at a more important time, but the State Government must now increase operational funding to allow the Royal to open more beds and employ more staff. The waiting lists were already too long and are now even longer because many procedures were postponed due to the pandemic. Attention should also turn to progressing the RHH Master Plan which includes a specialised mental health facility in the old Repatriation Hospital.

Mental health often misses out to other medical investment and this happened again during the pandemic. People will be dealing with the psychological trauma of this event for years and the Federal Government's \$48m pandemic funding boost is a fraction of what's needed. It's time to stop patching up a broken system and acknowledge that the mental-health sector needs massive reform and investment.

Primary health also deserves more attention. The number of people bulk-billed by their GP continues to fall because of years of inadequate Medicare rebate indexation. As a result many people avoid their GP because they can't afford the gap fee, which leads to more serious health problems down the track. The Federal Government must increase the Medicare rebate to give Tasmanians greater access to bulk-billing doctors. Telehealth has been a welcome addition to GP offerings but there's a question mark over its future. The Government must fund this service adequately if it is to ensure GP clinics are financially sustainable and prepared to continue offering the service.

Tasmania has some of the worst health statistics in Australia for smoking, obesity, heart disease, diabetes and a range of cancers. This is no accident of nature, but rather the consequence of many things including the fact that successive federal and Tasmanian governments have failed to effectively promote wellness in the community. Even small investments can deliver huge rewards down the track and reverse or prevent a life of chronic illness. In fact every \$1 invested in wellness saves the health budget at least \$5.

If you're one of the many Tasmanians who have put off seeing their doctor, dentist or allied health professional due to concerns about the pandemic, don't delay and make an appointment today. Look after your health.







# COVID-19

**If you have a fever, runny nose, cough, sore/itchy throat or shortness of breath it is recommended you get tested for COVID-19**

Australia has responded well and is a world leader in the control of the COVID-19 pandemic. We should be proud of our health, police and emergency-service workers. Credit is also due to the many other people who have kept essential services going, for example schools, childcare centres and supermarkets. The community by and large has done a good job too by staying home and practising health precautions. But we must remember the threat is not over and that we should not become complacent and drop our guard. Physical distancing is still crucial to avoiding this disease.

Tasmania suffered one of Australia's deadliest pandemic outbreaks in the North West and the State Government must honour its commitment to hold an independent inquiry to get to the bottom of what happened. This cluster led to hospital closures, the mass quarantine of thousands of people and, tragically, resulted in a tenth of the national pandemic death toll. We must learn the lessons from this episode.

There will be challenges and opportunities for Tasmania as we recover from the pandemic. The financial cost will be felt for years, for instance the State Government is facing a massive \$700m deficit this financial year and falling revenue due to drops in GST and other taxes. Some of Tasmania's biggest sectors have taken the hardest hits, such as tourism, hospitality, arts and culture, and tertiary education.

JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments are keeping thousands of Tasmanians afloat and must not be wound up too soon. JobKeeper's eligibility was always too narrow and many missed out including some casuals and people in the arts, local government and at the University of Tasmania. Moreover many small businesses could not retain their workers because they couldn't afford to cover their wages before the payments began. The reviews of JobKeeper must consider eligibility and the need to continue the wage subsidy for the industries that won't 'snap back'. For people looking for work it's vital JobSeeker does not drop back to Newstart's \$40 a day, which was clearly not enough to live on.

Other stimulus measures have also had their problems. Many eligible small businesses missed out on the State Government's hardship grants which had a haphazard and arbitrary selection process. HomeBuilder is a missed opportunity to invest in more social housing, creating a taxpayer-owned asset and helping vulnerable Australians. And while free childcare was a great help for many families and should be retained, the funding model needs to provide financial viability for childcare centres and family day care.

There will be tremendous opportunities for Tasmania after the pandemic, especially if the State focuses on its strengths and natural advantages. For example Tasmania is well-positioned as a safe haven to attract domestic and trans-Tasman tourists and remote workers. Tasmania's clean green energy also has huge potential and Marinus Link could generate \$5bn in revenue. We're already about 90 per cent reliant on renewable energy and are working on pumped hydro, a number of new wind farms and establishing a green hydrogen industry. This will make Tasmania a reliable exporter of renewable power and an exemplar for the rest of the country. And stimulus spending will boost affordable housing stocks which, combined with the shift away from short-term accommodation, should help ease the housing crisis.

## Have your say

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council will next month consult the community on how the State should recover from the pandemic. Visit [www.pesrac.tas.gov.au](http://www.pesrac.tas.gov.au)

## Poker machines

Just as seatbelts and drink-driving laws made driving safer, we need measures to make poker machines less harmful. The tragic fact is that about 80 per cent of people addicted to gambling are addicted to poker machines, which results in at least 400 suicides in Australia each year. Logically governments would not have allowed the re-start of poker machines after the pandemic. But seeing as they now continue to kowtow to the industry they must also do something about gambling's shocking death toll.

In Tasmania, the State Government's proposed new gambling laws don't include harm-minimisation measures. Andrew has developed the Poker Machine Community Protection Plan with four measures that will make a real difference. He is urging State MPs to support the Plan when the Government resurrects its poker machine changes.

Watch the Wilkie Report on this issue

[andrewwilkie.org/project/the-wilkie-report-april-2020-one-month-without-pokies-do-the-maths/](http://andrewwilkie.org/project/the-wilkie-report-april-2020-one-month-without-pokies-do-the-maths/)

**Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 or Lifeline 13 11 14**

### Poker Machine Community Protection Plan

- ✓ Slower spins
- ✓ \$1 maximum bets
- ✓ Tougher fines for venues
- ✓ No addictive features



Parts of the Darwin Port have been leased to a Chinese company for 99 years

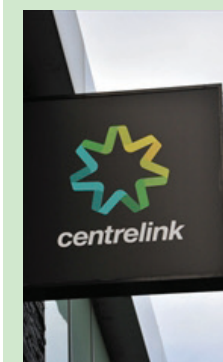
## Reining in foreign investment

Australia needs foreign investment, but it's still good to see the Federal Government finally committing to be more careful when approving it. Andrew has been pressuring the Government for years for a more stringent process, and in fact at the start of the pandemic one of the first issues he raised with the Federal Treasurer was the need to prevent assets and distressed companies being snapped up by predatory foreign buyers. It had long been madness the way foreign interests have been allowed to buy up or lease strategic assets like the Darwin Port, mainland gas distribution systems and broad-acre prime agricultural land, including here in Tasmania. The Government has promised all foreign purchases will have to pass a national security assessment.

## Climate change and bushfires

We mustn't make the mistake of thinking last summer's fires won't happen again, or that there won't be a repeat of the 1967 tragedy here in Tasmania. Remember Hobart is assessed by bushfire experts to be the nation's most bushfire-vulnerable capital city. Relatively cheaply and easily, the nation's fleet of C130 Hercules could be quickly converted into large firefighters with a proven roll-on roll-off tank system. It's time to seriously consider Australia establishing a dedicated RAAF firefighting capability.

The simple fact is Hobart's extreme bushfire risk is exacerbated by climate change. Any effective response to Australia's fires, droughts and storms must include urgent carbon emission reductions. Indeed Australia must be put on a credible pathway to zero-net carbon emissions and 100 per cent renewable energy.



## Robodebt

The Federal Government has finally scrapped its flawed robodebt program and agreed to pay back \$721m in false debts. From July, 373,000 Australians slapped with incorrect debts have been promised refunds. The problems with this automated system were clear from the start and Andrew was one of the first to raise the alarm about robodebt as far back as 2016. Indeed his advocacy for low-income Australians helped prompt Commonwealth Ombudsman investigations. During the past four years, Andrew and his staff have helped hundreds of people challenge their dodgy debts and witnessed the financial and psychological toll. Andrew is now focussed on making sure everybody who paid a robodebt is refunded and gets the apology they're owed.



## Gifted children

The Tasmanian Association for the Gifted (TAG) is a non-profit parent-based organisation that supports and advocates for the needs of gifted children, their parents and their educators. Gifted children are those capable of achieving in the top 10 per cent of their age peers and are found in every community and classroom.

[www.tasgifted.com](http://www.tasgifted.com) or 0467 528 048

[www.facebook.com/TasmanianAssociationForTheGifted](https://www.facebook.com/TasmanianAssociationForTheGifted)

## Dress for Success

Dress for Success has opened in Hobart. It empowers women with work attire, job mentoring, career development and a supportive network to achieve employment and economic independence.

Women are supplied with appropriate clothing for job interviews which helps them present well and builds their confidence. The service accepts self-referrals.



Image by Amy Brown photography

If you or someone you know could benefit from the services provided by Dress for Success, please get in touch via Facebook.

[facebook.com/dressforsuccesshobart](https://facebook.com/dressforsuccesshobart)

[www.instagram.com/dfshobart](https://www.instagram.com/dfshobart)

[hobart@dressforsuccess.org](mailto:hobart@dressforsuccess.org) or 0417 604 125

## Greyhounds need you

The aim of Let Greyhounds Run Free is to end greyhound racing. Despite the Tasmanian Government's spin on improvements to the industry, hundreds of dogs continue to die every year in the State – and thousands more around Australia.



The group is looking for volunteers. If you're experienced in fund raising, research, data entry or analysis, and would like to help, please get in touch.

[www.letgreyhoundsrunfree.net.au](http://www.letgreyhoundsrunfree.net.au) or [fmc0805@gmail.com](mailto:fmc0805@gmail.com)

## Good karma

Remember the days when you could pop next door to borrow a cup of sugar? Good Karma Networks are facebook groups resurrecting that kind of friendly neighbourhood. Neighbours meet in these positive and supportive virtual communities to give away household goods, plants and backyard produce, find lost pets and make new friends. Check the website to see if your community has a Good Karma Network. Lenah Valley, Lutana, Moonah, New Town, Sandy Bay, South Hobart, Tarooma and West Hobart are up and running.

[www.goodkarmaeffect.com](http://www.goodkarmaeffect.com)

## Want to get in touch with Andrew?

- Phone 6234 5255 or 6234 5861
- Email [andrew.wilkie.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:andrew.wilkie.mp@aph.gov.au)
- Post GPO Box 32 Hobart 7001
- Ask for a virtual meeting

[www.andrewwilkie.org](http://www.andrewwilkie.org)

## Community notice board

### Debt helpline

If you're having problems with debt, a great starting point can be the National Debt Helpline. Its website



has simple step-by-step guides explaining how to manage your debts and get your finances back under control. Or you can call to speak to a free and independent financial counsellor. The National Debt Helpline is a not-for-profit, community-based service that's available to people in Australia experiencing financial difficulty.

[ndh.org.au](http://ndh.org.au) or 1800 007 007

### Mental health survey

This SANE Australia Hocking Community Grant research is seeking people caring for loved ones with complex mental health issues to complete a survey. Unpaid mental health carers will be asked what services and support would empower them and protect against carer fatigue and burnout. The survey can be found at [surveymonkey.com/r/YTCRTG2](https://surveymonkey.com/r/YTCRTG2) or use the QR code.



[salisbury.ac@gmail.com](mailto:salisbury.ac@gmail.com)

or Mental Health Family and Friends 6228 7448

### Disability voices

Disability Voices Tasmania is holding free Zoom workshops starting this week. The workshops will develop the capacity of Tasmanians with a disability to influence their own lives and build a collective, powerful voice. Tasmanian of the Year 2015 and LGBTIQ+ campaigner Rodney Croome and former Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Robin Banks will lead the workshops that focus on using your story to influence decision makers and developing your pitch.

[projects@disabilityvoicetas.org.au](mailto:projects@disabilityvoicetas.org.au) or 6215 6800

### Keeping vehicle costs down

It's expensive keeping a car on the road but some relief is on the way. For some years Andrew has been lobbying the Federal Government to force automotive manufacturers to share their propriety vehicle repair data with all workshops on fair and reasonable terms. Currently almost all manufacturers (except for Holden) share this information only with dealers. This restricts where you can get your vehicle serviced and often pushes prices up. Andrew is pleased to see that the Government is progressively mandating data-sharing, which will increase consumer choice and help bring down the cost of operating a motor vehicle. Examples of what services will be affected include technical service bulletins, software upgrades and vehicle diagnosis.

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