



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

19 MARCH 1978

PORTLAND NURSING HOME OPENING

I am particularly pleased to be here today to open these further extensions to the Portland Hospital.

This is a great country hospital which has served this district for 130 years.

Mr. Maling and his Committee, Mr. Stanway, Matron Farrands, and all the staff, are to be commended on the very high standard of service which this hospital provides for the Portland community.

The Commonwealth has been able in the last couple of years to provide substantial assistance for the up-grading of the hospital's facilities and equipment.

First, we were able to finance the complete overhaul of the kitchen facilities at a cost in excess of half a million dollars.

Now we are contributing over \$300,000 towards this new 31 bed accommodation complex for the aged.

It is important for the Portland District that there be high standard accommodation available within the district to meet the special needs of old people.

It will be of great comfort to families to have these facilities available at close hand.

Older people, their families and friends can thereby be re-assured-- and this is as it should be.

Old people needing this type of accommodation can now continue to live in the same district in which they have resided for most or all of their lives.

In this way, there is minimum disruption and families retain the greatest opportunities for mutual support and access to each other.

I am advised that the capital cost of this project is around \$500,000 and further substantial amounts are required to equip and furnish the new wing.

As the Commonwealth's contribution is in the order of \$318,000, this has still left a very considerable sum to be raised with this community.

You are all, as a community, to be commended on the significant contributions and sacrifices which you have made to enable this project to proceed.

Such a spirit of self-help, of community action -- where people and groups are not completely dependent on governments for their needs -- is wholly admirable.

My Government's social welfare philosophy sets great store on the role of families and voluntary community groups in caring for the sick, the aged and the handicapped.

Without this our social welfare programmes would run the danger of being just monolithic impersonal arrangements, failing to meet the real needs of those requiring care and what is more, they would be very much more expensive.

Health and the cost of health care is a subject very much to the fore in people's minds at the present time.

Health costs are a matter of deep concern to the Government.

One simple illustration will suffice.

Total health expenditure in 1971/72 was \$2.2 billion. For 1976/77 this is estimated to have risen to \$6.2 billion -- a staggering rise in just five years.

We have already managed to stem the rate of increase but further action will be required.

A complete review of health costs is currently in progress and the Government hopes to be able during the course of this year to announce new initiatives in this area.

The Commonwealth's support for this new accommodation wing will not stop with the completion of construction.

We will continue to provide financial assistance for the patients to be accommodated here through the payment of nursing home benefits.

The Nursing Home Benefits Scheme was substantially improved last October.

Many patients and their families were experiencing real hardship in meeting the difference between the fees charged and the benefits which were then paid.

The peace of mind that comes from knowing that at least that bill is now largely covered must be of enormous comfort to patients.

I commend everyone concerned in the planning and construction of this new wing.

This is an event of significance for Portland and I have much pleasure in declaring the nursing home wing of the Portland and District Hospital officially open.