

Call to PM:

Keep promise to improve services first

Services First – a new alliance of doctors, teachers and community organisations (including National Shelter) – called on Prime Minister John Howard to stick to his commitment to not offer tax cuts until services were adequate. New research, the *Services First Fact Sheets**, shows Australian families can ill afford further tax cuts.

“Health, education and community services are in crisis. Another tax cut would rob families of basic services to buy votes. We call on the Prime Minister to get the basic needs of families met before indulging in the luxury of any more tax cuts,” Services First spokesperson Andrew McCallum said.

“The estimated budget surplus of \$3.8 billion would only provide a tax cut of \$10 a week for an average wage earner. If further tax cuts are introduced, the number of people on waiting lists for hospitals, housing and aged care will soar, schools and universities will be stretched to their limit and many families will be unable to obtain child care and disability services.”

Among the urgent problems identified in the *Services First Fact Sheets** are:

- The proportion of bulk billed doctor’s visits fell from 78 % of all consultations in 2000 to 66% last year and average Medicare gap fees rose from \$10 to \$14.
- Public schools receive only 1/3rd of Commonwealth funding to educate 70 % of the nation’s students. Many schools are unable to afford basic repairs and are forced to increase class sizes.
- Over 70,000 eligible applicants missed out on first round university offers for 2004. Over 40,000 applicants to TAFE courses cannot get a place due to a freeze on federal funding.
- There are 174,500 parents on waiting lists for child care places plus child care fees have risen by 25% in the past 18 months.
- 298 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are located 100 kilometres or more from the nearest hospital and 15% of these do not have access to a general medical practitioner.
- **Public housing waiting lists have grown by 15 % since 1990 from 195,000 to 223,290 households in 2001.**

“These statistics indicate Australia can not afford any more tax cuts. 88 % of voters would prefer the Government to use money to fix problems in community services, a Roy Morgan poll found. It’s time to end the bidding war between political parties on tax cuts and get the basic needs of families right first,” Services First spokesperson Andrew McCallum said.

* *Services First Fact Sheets* are available on: www.servicesfirst.org.au/resources.htm

More information: www.servicesfirst.org.au