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Transcript: AMA President, Professor Steve Robson on ABC AM, Tuesday, 23 August 2022

Subject: Health workforce round table meeting

SABRA LANE: Severe staffing shortages are also hitting our Healthcare system. It's why doctors, nurses and peak health care bodies are meeting with the Federal Health Minister today ahead of next week's Jobs and Skills Summit. They want to fast-track the intake of more international health workers and fund more training and incentive programs for the domestic workforce.

Katherine Gregory reports.

REPORTER: The pandemic revealed some home truths about our healthcare system; the critical role of its workers and how there's just not enough of them.

STEVE ROBSON: I think if the pandemic has shown us anything, it's that you can't have a healthy economy without healthy Australians and that means a healthy workforce.

REPORTER: Professor Steve Robson is the National President of the Australian Medical Association.

STEVE ROBSON: So we need to future-proof the system and because it takes so long to train a doctor, it takes so long to get experience as a healthcare worker, there is no time to waste. All of the changes to the system need to be made now.

REPORTER: Professor Robson wants incentive programs that'll encourage more medical graduates to go into general practice, particularly in remote and regional areas.

STEVE ROBSON: It's going to mean working conditions, it's going to mean remuneration, it's going to mean respect from the Government to make it a job that people want to do.

REPORTER: He says the same approach needs to be applied to public hospitals to make them more attractive workplace as well.

It's all part of the AMA's National Health Workforce Strategy, which tries to match community needs with how many doctors need to be trained in particular specialist areas and geographic regions. It means funding more specialist training placements and regional training and research hospitals. Professor Robson also wants a couple of big commitments from the Federal Government.

STEVE ROBSON: So if we're going to have healthcare in Australia that works for Australians, we need functional public hospitals and we need to modify the funding model of Australia's public hospitals - the bigger contribution from the Federal Government to make sure that they're appropriately resourced. And also, that we need to free up the general practitioners who do have to do their job, by making sure that they have access to Telehealth.

REPORTER: It's not just the public health care system that's under strain. Private hospitals are also struggling with a lack of staff. Michael Roff is the CEO of the Australian Private Hospitals Association.

MICHAEL ROFF: Currently, we've got about 8000 vacant nursing positions in the private hospital sector alone and we think many of those could be filled with skilled migration. But Australia is losing the race to attract skilled health workers to other countries that are offering incentives, particularly pathways to residency and citizenship. And if we don't address that issue very quickly, we're going to be left with an insufficient health workforce to meet current challenges, let alone challenges of the future.

REPORTER: Michael Roff also wants the Federal Government to process visas faster and more money to help with training, registration, and sponsoring for skilled migrant health workers. All these issues will be discussed at a meeting with the Federal Health Minister, Mark Butler, today.

He's expected to tell the gathering that the Albanese Government is committed to bolstering the workforce via better training and career pathways, as well as providing accommodation, access to healthcare and essential services for workers in remote and regional areas.

SABRA LANE: Katherine Gregory.

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