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MEDIA RELEASE

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AHIA Conference 2008 – Health Care: Making the Case for Quality

Private health Funds from across Australia have gathered in Sydney for the Australian Health Insurance Association's annual two day conference, opened this morning by Health Minister Nicola Roxon.

AHIA CEO, Dr Michael Armitage said the Industry welcomed the Minister's announcement to extend arrangements enabling young adults up to the age of 25 to remain covered by their family policy.

"The Industry has lobbied strongly for the continuation of "extended dependent" policies and it is great news for the industry and for privately insured families that the Government will seek to legislate for this to become a permanent arrangement."

"It is also good news that the Minister has committed to improving the rate of Informed Financial Consent (IFC). The incidence of patients receiving surprise gap fees remains too high and the AHIA looks forward to working with the Government to ensure privately insured Australians are given information about fees and charges prior to treatment whenever possible."

Dr Armitage said the 2008 Conference would focus on ways to provide better health care for Australians and delegates would hear from a range of Australian and internationally renowned health care experts exploring ways to improve the quality and safety in the health system.

"The Private Health Insurance Industry, which represents more than half of the Australian population (10.9 million people), has a responsibility to advocate for better health outcomes and better value for its members."

Dr Armitage said the newly elected AHIA President Richard Bowden (Bupa Australia) would continue the excellent work of retiring President Terry Smith (HCF) to ensure the industry remained at the forefront of consumer advocacy in the health care sector.

President Richard Bowden said the role of the AHIA was more important than ever as the operating environment for the PHI Industry had changed.

"We are working with a new Government and the industry has undergone some consolidation so it is imperative that the AHIA ensures the views of its members, particularly our smaller funds are heard at a national level.

"Protecting the balance between the private and public health sectors is crucial to the future of better health care in Australia and the AHIA will continue to highlight the importance of maintaining incentives which encourage people to be privately insured".

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