AUSTRALIAN NURSING FEDERATION
2013 FEDERAL ELECTION SURVEY

1. Industrial Relations

The Australian Greens have consistently advocated for greater industrial protections for nurses.

The Greens secured amendments to the ‘s457 visa’ legislation to protect local nursing jobs, negotiating a specific requirement for nurses to be covered by the new labour market testing requirements. The Greens’ Fair Work Amendment (Tackling Job Insecurity) Bill 2012 also pushed for job security for casual workers via a process for workers employed on an ‘insecure’ basis to be moved to ongoing employment on a part-time or full-time basis overseen by the Fair Work Commission. We have consistently supported moves to close the gender pay gap.

Maintenance and extension of the modern award and NES

The Australian Greens support the maintenance and extension of modern awards and the National Employment Standards, especially to ensure a uniform ‘floor’ of wages and conditions so that employers can’t gain a competitive advantage on the basis of employee entitlements. We have consistently opposed any attempt to strip back the contents of awards, whether under Labor or Liberal, and believe that issues such as nurse/patient ratios and job security should be allowable award matters. We have also moved in Parliament to extend the rights available under the NES.

We support the work of the Australian Nursing Federation to achieve this outcome and especially to improve the position of nurses in the private sector.

Enterprise Bargaining and collective agreement making

Given that awards and the NES now provide a low floor of minimum standards, the Greens understand the importance of collective agreements. In Parliament, the Greens have sought to:

- Amend the Fair Work Act to stop employers (especially state public sector employers) from dragging out disputes or provoking industrial action as a way of bypassing proper bargaining;
- Ensure that any arbitration of disputes is a ‘full’ resolution that covers all claims made by employees, including minimum staffing, nurse/patient ratios and job security clauses;
- Extend the matters about which people can bargain by removing artificial restrictions;
- Ensure that collective agreements cannot be ‘contracted out’ of and that collective agreements override individual agreements;
- Remove the elements of WorkChoices which Labor has kept in the Fair Work Act, because these provisions make it more difficult to bargain fairly; and
- Give employees greater rights to work/life balance, while ensuring collective agreements retain primacy.

Right of entry provisions for union officials

Employees’ rights at work can only be properly enforced if union representatives have the ability to inspect workplaces and meet with workers. The Greens supported changes to the Fair Work Act to improve the right of entry for unions and ensured that this law passed Parliament before the end of the sitting period.

Improving Superannuation contributions

The Greens worked with the Government to increase the rate of employer superannuation contributions from 9% to 12% to ensure all workers have adequate income in their retirement.

2. Workforce

The Australian Greens are committing to ANF’s aim of ensuring Australia has a nursing and midwifery workforce that is adequately educated and properly resourced to meet the pressures created by increasing workloads and more complex care.

Managing nurse and midwife workloads (ratios/NHPPD)

The Australian Greens take issues of workforce planning seriously and are aware of the increasing burden on nurses and midwives. The Greens support greater investment in the healthcare system to manage these challenges. In general the Greens are supportive of ratios and appreciate that the NHPPD staffing model has led to good outcomes for patients.

Reimbursement of HELP fees for graduate nurses who accept and remain employed in areas of high need

Yes, the Greens would support the forgiving of HELP debts in areas of skill shortage areas such as nursing and midwifery, and in regions of high need.

While the current HECS-HELP Benefit of $1,716.85 (2013-14) for nursing is welcome, it is not enough. The Greens believe all Australians are entitled to free, well-funded and high quality life-long education and training, with adequate income support and minimising of student HELP debts.

The phasing out of student debt requires greater public investment in universities. The Greens are campaigning for a 10% increase to public base funding per student at public universities and a reversal of Labor’s $2.3 billion higher education budget cuts.
We are also working to reverse the conversion of start-up scholarships to HELP loans, and for an increased Youth Allowance so students can concentrate on their studies instead of working longer hours to meet rising cost of living expenses.

**Working with state governments to investigate innovative transition to practice programs for nurses and midwives**

The Australian Greens are in favour of working with state governments on transition to practice programs for nurses and midwives. As our health system comes under increasing strain in the future, the Greens are also open to exploring areas where scope of practice for nurses and nurse practitioners could be expanded to improve the lives of patients and make hospitals and other parts of the system more efficient as well as providing new career avenues for nurses.

**Development of strategic workforce plans for nurses and midwives**

The need for strategic planning around medical workforce issues, particularly nursing and midwifery, is real and timely and the Greens support the development of national workforce plans.

3. **Aged Care**

**Will you commit to continuing the Aged Care Workforce Compact?**

Yes, the Greens remain committed to the Aged Care Workforce Compact.

The Australian Greens have worked hard with people across the aged care sector in order to ensure that the Living Longer, Living Better legislation was as effective as possible in providing all Australians with the quality, accessible care they deserve in later life. Our amendments, along with the commitments that the Government has made in response to the comprehensive committee inquiry, have improved the legislation.

**Will you mandate the requirement for a registered nurse on duty 24 / 7 for all stand-alone aged care facilities?**

The Greens recognise that aged care is increasingly complex care and we want to see increased funding to enhance the numbers, skills and salaries of staff in the aged care sector. While the Greens believe that the Federal Government must play a central role in the provision, regulation and support of aged care services, it is not clear that blanket staffing regimes are the most effective means of delivering high quality aged care within budget constraints. The Australian Greens believe that access to high quality, appropriate health and aged care services should be on the basis of need.

**Will you agree to register under the national law all Assistants in nursing (however titled) who deliver nursing care and nursing services?**

The Greens are open to considering a register of all assistants in nursing. We want to deliver a high quality aged care system characterised by quality support, nursing and personal care,
with safe and comfortable surroundings for older people and would consider a national register in that context.

4. Healthcare

What will your party do to improve funding reform / reform of the health system in Australia?

The Australians Greens believe an effective health system must be based on both primary health care and preventative health care measures, such as health promotion, disease prevention, risk reduction and early intervention, in order to manage chronic disease, reduce ill-health and avoid hospital admissions.

The Greens understand that an effective health care system is dependent upon a well skilled and well-resourced workforce. To facilitate this, the Greens support the re-direction of funds that currently subsidise private health insurance back into the public health system, including public hospitals.

The Green will continue to pursue a suite of reforms such as improved food labelling, restrictions on pharmaceutical lobbying and greater investment in medical research. The Greens understand that individual health outcomes are influenced by an inter-relationship of biological, social, economic and environmental factors. The Greens will continue to work to improve these factors through policies such as decreased fossil fuel extraction and improved environmental monitoring.

Will your party work towards maintaining the newly established e-Health system that enhances patient care?

Yes. Despite some concerns we have had with the introduction of a national eHealth scheme, the Greens believe it is a positive long term reform for healthcare in Australia that will empower people to take control of their health, improve communication between healthcare professionals and reduce medical errors.

5. Climate Change

In government, what will your party do to combat the harmful effects of climate change in relation to the health care sector?

The Greens believe climate change is currently the greatest crisis facing the health sector in Australia.

We have previously called on the Government to create a climate change and health task force, to undertake research into the health risks posed by climate change and develop a strategic plan to prevent and manage those risks; and we will continue to do so.

The Greens understand that the health impacts of climate change can be best managed through investments in evidence based public health interventions, such as health promotion, disease surveillance, disaster preparedness, mosquito control, vaccination and improved primary and mental health care.

Australian Greens

www.greens.org.au
The Greens recently launched our Clean Energy Roadmap which sets out our plan to transition Australia to 100% renewables as quickly as possible by increasing Clean Energy Finance to $30 billion over ten years and setting a target of 90% Renewable Energy Target by 2030. In the meantime the Greens are proposing the creation of a health sustainability unit to provide leadership and practical advice to the health sector on how to cut their emissions and improve sustainability.

6. Social Determinants of Health

Will your party ratify the WHO commission on social determinants of health recommendations? & Will your party set specific goals and targets and allocate funding to implement the recommendations?

Yes, the Australian Greens are committed to the WHO Commission’s recommendations on social determinants of health.

In March 2013 the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, chaired by Greens Senator Rachel Siewert, delivered the report ‘Australia’s domestic response into the WHO Commission’s Social Determinants of Health’. In that report Greens Senators Siewert and Di Natale recommended that Government:

- adopt the WHO report and commit to addressing the social determinants of health in Australia;
- adopt administrative practices to ensure consideration of the social determinants of health in all relevant policy deliberations;
- centralise responsibility for addressing the social determinants of health in a single agency;
- and that the NHMRC give greater emphasis in its grant allocation priorities to research on public health and social determinants research.

The Greens stand by these recommendations and in Government would pursue them in full.

Will you preserve preventative health services such as Breast Screen and Drug and alcohol Services?

Yes, the Australian Greens will preserve preventative health services. The Greens understand that an effective health care system must include preventative health care measures. Australia is currently one of the most hospitalised countries in the world, which means we are failing to deliver adequate preventative health services.

The Greens want well-funded preventative health programs and health promotion services which include appropriate screening activities and healthy lifestyle education. Major programs like Denticare are ideal opportunities to invest in Australia’s preventative health, as is the existing BreastScreen program, widely recognised as one of the most comprehensive population-based screening programs in the world.

The Greens believe that Alcohol and Drug services are an essential part of tackling the devastating social and health consequences of drug abuse. These types of front line services
are always the first to be cut when budget savings need to be found and the Greens would rather see money redirected from drug law enforcement to more effective patient based, health focused drug and alcohol expenditure.

7. Mental Health

Will you commit to maintaining and extending the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program?

Yes, the Australian Greens are committed to the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program. We have consistently advised the government that maintaining existing service levels, a commitment which appears to operate as a funding cap, is inadequate. We know that barriers to new organisations or nurses joining the program prevent it from responding to demand for its services. We have advocated for proper evaluation of the program and its implications for people living with severe and persistent mental illness, as well as an adequate funding response to that evaluation.

In May 2013, the Greens investigated issues relating to MHNIP in Senate Budget Estimates hearings. These related to funding, session allocations and the MHNIP expert reference group and program redesign. The Department of Health and Ageing’s response to these questions on notice are due to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on 26 July 2013.

Will you remove the need for nurses working in the MHNIP to be credentialed prior to employment in the scheme?

The Australian Greens understand that barriers to nurses or organisations participating in the program prevent it from responding to demand for services. This is particularly so where such barriers are unreasonable.

We have not taken a position that the current credentialing process is an unreasonable requirement of mental health nurses. In order to ensure safety and quality of care, specialist skills and knowledge in mental health nurses must take priority.

Will you commit to allowing mental health nurse qualifications to be denoted on the register?

The Australian Greens are keen to see barriers to recruiting mental health nurses reduced, but we believe there are other ways to address this, which would be more effective than removing the credentialing requirement. These include streamlining the credentialing process, and addressing issues relating to workforce shortages generally.

Should the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia be willing to examine the option of endorsing mental health nurses, the Australian Greens would be interested in this option. However, we understand that the Board has previously considered this option, and declined to adopt it.

12 July 2013
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Will your party commit to:
- retain public hospitals in public ownership and management;
- stop any moves to privatise public hospitals, health services or community centres; and
- ensure any plans to privatise public facilities is abandoned.

Yes. The Australian Greens maintain a firm commitment to a strong public health system and one that is universal and equitable, and one that puts the health of patients first and foremost.

The Greens are committed to keeping public hospitals in public hands, including the administration and the provision essential health services.

The Greens would oppose any move to privatise health services and, in government, would scrap any existing privatisation undertaking.

The Australian Greens are strongly committed to keeping public hospitals in public hands.

19 July 2013