



MEDICAL RESEARCH

Hospital's \$740m health hub to rival world's best

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Health editor

The blockbuster health and innovation precinct planned for Liverpool Hospital will rival the greatest medical research institutions in the world, the masterminds behind the ambitious project say.

The alliance of stakeholders who first envisioned the \$740 million Liverpool Health and Academic Precinct in Tuesday's state budget are now laying plans for a private hospital in the south-west Sydney city.

"This is going to be the Mayo Clinic of Australasia," said Professor Les Bokey, a key member of the alliance, known as the Liverpool Innovation Precinct Committee (LIP). "A place of clinical and research excellence."

The health hub had the potential to pioneer breakthroughs in robotics and automation, cardiovascular research, brain injury, neuroscience and stroke, wound care, the microbiome, inflammatory bowel disease, hepatitis, liver and colorectal cancer, Professor Bokey said.

Three major universities have now embedded campuses in the precinct zone - UNSW, the University of Wollongong and the Western Sydney University, which opened its new campus last week. All three are represented on the LIP committee.

The group is also pushing for a private hospital within the precinct.

"There's an opportunity for a big private hospital to be placed in Liverpool, right alongside the public hospital," said committee member David Borger, western Sydney director of the Sydney Business Chamber. A number of private hospital entities were interested in the proposal, including St Vincent's Hospital Australia (SVHA).

Amanda Larkin, fellow committee member and chief executive of South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD), said a private hospital would allow clinicians to "move seamlessly" between the local public and private systems and offers the local community more options for care.

"It shares the workload of the health system so that ... there is more capacity in the public system for patients who either can't afford or don't want [private healthcare]," Ms Larkin said.

A spokesperson for SVHA said it was "definitely interested in the potential for building and operating a new hospital in the Liverpool health precinct" and had undertaken early discussions, though there were some "land access issues".

It is understood the proposed location is part of the TAFE campus.

Professor Bokey said his phone had not stopped ringing since Treasurer Dominic Perrottet an-

nounced the project at Tuesday's budget unveiling, with "outstanding young doctors" wanting to know how to be involved.

Ms Larkin said the incubator for medical innovation and education would be a major jobs generator.

"We would be by far the biggest employer in the area," she said.

The precinct had the potential to double the number of local jobs in health and education to 30,000 by 2026, according to the committee.

"It's also about equity of access to the best available healthcare for this community," Ms Larkin said. The major tertiary hospital was the health fulcrum of the largest and fastest growing district in Sydney.

By 2021, the population will have grown to more than one million and the number of people over 65 years of age will rise by 48 per cent.

It's a population with significantly higher proportions of patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and more complex medical conditions than their counterparts in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

The \$740 million will pay for a new comprehensive integrated cancer centre, a one-stop-hub for inpatient and outpatients services, diag-



nostics, treatment and follow up.

A major expansion would remedy Liverpool's overcrowded emergency department — the busiest in Australia — as well as its outdated maternity and neonatal intensive care units. Expected to be completed in 2026, the precinct was a core feature of the last budget before a state election and doubled-down on the Liberal government's focus on western Sydney and its hospital building boom.

But the project was not a pork-barrelling ploy, Mr Borger said, considering Liverpool was one of the safest Labor seats in the country.

"If [the government] wanted to buy votes with three-quarters-of-a-million dollars, they could have bought a lot more in other places," he said. "They did this because they genuinely believe this is a great investment. It's a chance to turn Liverpool around."

Chief executive of Liverpool City Council Kiersten Fishburn said the precinct combined with the Western Sydney Airport "assures a future with smart jobs for our residents".



An artist's impression of the new Liverpool health precinct.