

# \$650 million super clinics program well short of completion

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The Health Department said in 2009 that all of the clinics would be open by the end of 2011-12. Source: News Limited

**HALF the Federal Government's promised 59 super clinics are not open and 16 are not even under construction.**

Up to six years after they were promised as part of the \$650 million program, six of the 31 clinics announced in the 2007 election are still not open, two have been scrapped and three needed extra funding.

And three years after they were promised, only two of the 28 clinics promised in the 2010 election have opened their doors. Sixteen of these have not commenced construction and four sites do not even have contracts signed with potential providers.

The super clinics were meant to ease the pressure on public hospital

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emergency departments by joining bulk-billed GP services with diagnostic screening services, specialists and ancillary health providers and pharmacies.

The Australian Medical Association has attacked the clinics for competing with existing private practices and the Opposition claimed they were part of a pork barrelling strategy to help Labor win marginal seats.

AMA president Dr Steve Hambleton said whoever won the 2013 election should scrap any further spending on the program.

"If four contracts are unsigned they should be stopped instantly and the money should be reallocated to existing GP practices," he said.

Instead of adding to the number of doctors seeing patients, many super clinics had stolen staff from nearby medical practices, he said.

Opposition primary healthcare spokesman Dr Andrew Southcott said that "after five and a half years, the Government have run out of excuses to explain away the failure of this program".

"Rather than spend \$650 million on monuments to themselves, this money could have been better spent encouraging existing family practices to expand and stay open longer," he said.

A report by consultants Consan last year found only one GP super clinic was bulk billing all patients and it had to schedule 10-minute appointments.

Some clinics had trouble attracting staff and patients because rival doctors had campaigned against super clinics, the report found.

The Health Department said in 2009 that all of the clinics would be open by the end of 2011-12. Former health minister Nicola Roxon said they would be open by December 2011.

The slow progress on the program is revealed in the department's latest snapshot of the program, that will be subject to examination at a Senate estimates committee on Thursday.

A spokesman for Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said the vast majority of super clinics (49) are up and running, or well under way.

"As with any large building program, there can sometimes be issues along the way that add to timeframes, including lengthy council development processes, finding suitable land, inclement weather, and state government approvals.," the spokesman said.

"The Opposition has said they're opposed to each and every one.

"That means the Opposition opposes around \$400 million for GP Super

Clinics with GP services, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, podiatrists, psychologists, physiotherapists - and the list goes on.

"GP Super Clinics have provided over three million services to patients so far. Under Tony Abbott, that number would have been zero.

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