

Health leaders release \$68M revamp plan to fix sick Westmead precinct ahead of election

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Professor Roger Reddell (R) with then Liberal opposition leader Barry O'Farrell at the Westmead Children's Medical Research Institute in 2011 to announce \$50 million funding for the Research precinct including the Millennium Institute. Picture: Jeff Herbert *Source: The Daily Telegraph*

HEALTH leaders have released a \$68 million revamp plan of a key health precinct in the marginal seat of Parramatta in Sydney's west, challenging both parties to fix "drastic" infrastructure issues in the lead up to the election.

Westmead, which treats 1 million patients a year and employs 16,000 health professionals and researchers, was plagued with a backlog of "mundane issues" such as a lack of car parking and amenity, holding back the future of Australia's biggest medical precinct.

An alliance of health leaders, including Parramatta City Council, the Sydney Children's Hospital Network, Westmead Private Hospital, University of Sydney, Westmead Millennium Institute and the Western Sydney Local Health Service District, today revealed a concept plan to relieve the area of parking and congestion pressures, turning the tired streets into tree-lined boulevards.

While leading medical institutions are planning multi-million dollar expansions, they were losing key senior staff once they learned how difficult it was to find parking and patients struggled with getting to hospital for treatment, health leaders said.

"We have lost senior recruits when they realise how difficult it is to park here - the amenity should match the greatness of the institutions working here," Children's Medical Research Institute Professor Roger Reddell said.

"Parking and power are among our greatest risks."

The plan seeks \$20 million for new parking near the hospitals and research centres - which are 800m away from the Westmead Train Station and too far for parents and sick children to walk to.

"Crippling" traffic congestion, limited parking - too far from facilities - poor street amenity, limited accessibility and poor connectivity with the Parramatta CBD needed investment, Prof Reddell said.

"With all eyes on western Sydney leading up to the Federal election in September, we have a unique opportunity to focus attention on the strategic importance of Westmead."

Parramatta mayor John Chedid said Westmead had the largest concentration of health services in Australia.

"By 2038, Westmead will serve 50 per cent of the population in the region," he said.

He said the \$68 million plan was a "great opportunity for them to show their commitment to the region."

Parramatta City Council CEO Robert Lang said the concept plan came from a historic alliance, to address a drastic lack of parking and poor access.

"The plans are quite ambitious and the stakes are very high," he said.

"Without strategic investment, it's unlikely to meet the demands the future will hold. A lack of amenity will disrupt the growth, this investment will expand the capacity of the precinct. The upcoming election highlights the importance of this work and significance of western Sydney."

Mr Lang said development of Westmead must be "front and centre" of the election.

"The ambitious development pipeline has been clogged with mundane issues including access and parking," he said.

"It's an 800m walk from the station, people don't walk 800m - particularly with sick kids. There is also a lack of access that is causing a large number of car trips."

He said a tree lined boulevard should bring the precinct to life, with the activation to attract business, visitors and blue chip investment, unlocking millions of private investment in bio technology and research.

"There is not the funds in stretched healthcare budgets to pay for the upgrades," he said.

Parramatta state MP Geoff Lee said: "Whoever holds the seat of Parramatta, holds the government."

Federal Parramatta Liberal candidate Martin Zaiter said he would work to secure funds for infrastructure upgrades for Westmead health infrastructure over the next 100 days.

The wish list includes bridge widenings, road and intersection upgrades, landscaped walkways and more parking. It also proposes a light rail link over the Parramatta River.