

Rudd hits western Sydney

By Adam Bennett, AAP Updated August 18, 2013, 6:39 pm



Prime Minister Kevin Rudd knows western Sydney is vital to any hopes Labor has of being returned to government.

But he doesn't know where Merrylands is.

"OK, I'm a Queenslander - you could have told me that was in Timbuktu," Mr Rudd told the Ortiz family, who live in the suburb that straddles the Labor-held seats of Parramatta and Blaxland.

Treasurer Chris Bowen was able to set him straight.

"It's a great place," said the Labor MP for McMahon, whose electorate takes in Merrylands West.

Mr Rudd was touring Westmead Hospital to sell Labor's \$122 million commitment to redeveloping the facility if it wins the election on September 7.

The investment is part of a \$357 million package to modernise hospital and medical treatment facilities across the country.

It has a focus on cancer care at centres in Sydney's west, southeast Queensland and southwest Western Australia.

The redevelopment of Westmead Hospital - the first since 1978 - makes up most of the package and Labor wants the NSW state coalition government to match it dollar for dollar.

"The people of greater western Sydney deserve first class health services," Mr Rudd said.

Mingling with families at Westmead Children's Medical Research Institute, the prime minister was perhaps wise not to mention needles - given his new hardline approach to kids' vaccinations.

Lachlan, 8, was nervous enough to be meeting the leader, but was soon sitting on his knee.

Labor's western Sydney MPs Ed Husic (Mount Druitt), Julie Owens (Parramatta) and David Bradbury (Lindsay) were with Mr Rudd for the multi-million dollar health announcement.

The opinion polls show the ALP has fallen behind the coalition in western Sydney.

But that didn't deter Mr Rudd from ridiculing Liberal candidates banned from speaking at local community events.

He dubbed it the "the Diaz Plan" - a reference to Liberal Greenway candidate Jaymes Diaz.

Mr Diaz spectacularly failed to remember the coalition's six point asylum seeker plan during a television interview earlier this month, which subsequently went viral on the internet.

He's avoided directly engaging with the media since then and last week didn't respond to journalists trailing Opposition Leader Tony Abbott in Penrith.

"Let's call it the Diaz Plan, which has three principles associated with German U boat commanders - dive, dive, dive," Mr Rudd joked.