



# TODAY'S NEWS

Monday, 23rd February 2026

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[Assistant Minister White](#) | [Special Envoy Repacholi](#) | [Department](#)  
| [Ageing and Aged Care](#) | [Disability and Carers](#) | [Primary Care](#)  
| [Population Health](#) | [Chronic Conditions and Screening](#) |  
[Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#) | [Immunisation](#) | [Health Systems Strategies](#)  
| [Health Economics & Research](#) | [First Nations Health](#)  
| [Public Hospital and Health Reform](#) | [Chief Nursing and Midwifery Office](#)  
| [Health Workforce](#) | [Technology Assessment and Access](#)  
| [Medicare Benefits and Digital Health](#) | [Benefits Integrity](#) | [Australian CDC](#) |  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **[The Australian Financial Review](#)** (page 1) reports Federal Health Minister Mark Butler expressed support for a proposal to transition Healthscope into a not-for-profit entity, but a rival bid from Calvary Health Care and Northwest Healthcare Properties now threatens to derail that agreement.
- **[The Australian](#)** (page 7) reports that following bilateral deals with South Australia and the Northern Territory, Minister Mark Butler is pushing to sign the remaining states to the Thriving Kids program in preparation for a national rollout.
- **[The Australian](#)** (page 7) reports Health Minister Mark Butler has commissioned a review of treatment guidelines for gender-diverse children following the suspension of a puberty blocker clinical trial in the UK over safety concerns.
- **[The Age](#)** (page 9) reports the RACGP has called for Medicare rebate and pricing decisions to be delegated to an independent body to provide financial certainty and prevent the politicisation of healthcare funding.
- **[The Australian](#)** (page 1) reports Barnaby Joyce has proposed making regional service a mandatory condition for medical graduates to obtain a Medicare provider number, arguing that the Federal Government must address the abundance of doctors in cities compared to regional shortages.

- **[The Herald Sun](#)** (page 1) reports doctors represented by AMA Victoria are seeking mandatory fatigue measures, including a 12.5 hour shift cap, to address workload concerns that currently jeopardise patient safety.
- **[The Age](#)** (page 1) reports the families of at least 40 Victorians are initiating legal action against the state health system following claims that relatives died by suicide after being prematurely discharged or denied admission to mental health units.
- **[The Burnie Advocate](#)** (page 7) reports Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Emma McBride has announced the opening of a temporary Medicare Mental Health Centre in Burnie to provide free, walk-in clinical care and peer support for regional Tasmanians.

## MINISTER BUTLER

### New Canadian bid for Healthscope hospitals

Australian Financial Review, General News, 23/02/2026, Michael Smith, Page 1

Calvary Health Care is working with Healthscope's landlords on a new offer for the country's second-largest private hospital group, challenging a deal agreed between receivers McGrathNicol and lenders to turn the company into a not-for-profit operator.

Also reported by: [Australian Financial Review \(Online\)](#).

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### Blood a problem but he is healing a crisis

Australian Financial Review, Companies and Markets, 23/02/2026, Michael Smith, Page 17

Tino La Spina is one of the few people in his family who cannot stand the sight of blood.

Also reported by: [Australian Financial Review \(Online\)](#).

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### Thriving Kids program off to shaky start with just two deals in place

The Australian, General News, 23/02/2026, Sarah Ison, Page 7

Labor's landmark program to direct autistic children off the \$50bn-a-year national disability scheme has been agreed to by South Australia and the Northern Territory, marking Health Minister Mark Butler's first set of deals since launching his Thriving Kids policy. Despite Mr Butler earlier this month saying that he hoped all agreements would be struck by February 20 and enable the \$4bn in Thriving Kids funding to begin rolling out nationwide, deals with most jurisdictions are yet to be struck.

Also reported by: [The Australian \(Online\)](#).

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### UK safety fears halt puberty drug trial

The Australian, General News, 23/02/2026, Rachel Baxendale, Page 7

Australia's health ministers and pediatric gender clinics have been put on notice after the UK's national health watchdog paused a clinical trial of the use of puberty-blocking drugs on children due to safety concerns including risks of infertility, reduced bone density and impacts on brain development. [...]

Asked whether Health Minister Mark Butler was comfortable with the continued availability of puberty blockers in Australia, a spokeswoman said the provision of public gender services to young people in Australia was "exclusively led by states and territories, who are responsible for the relevant services and employ the relevant clinicians".

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### GPs want to end Medicare politics, fix bulk billing

Age, General News, 23/02/2026, Natassia Chrysanthos, Page 9

Australia's GPs want the federal government to butt out of Medicare funding, saying decisions about rebates and prices should be delegated to an independent body to avoid the politicisation of healthcare. [...] Data from the office of Health Minister Mark Butler shows that the federal government's Medicare investment is turning around GP bulk-billing rates: since November, when the Albanese

government began paying doctors incentives not to charge patients out-of-pocket fees, 1300 extra clinics have become fully bulk-billing.

Also reported by: [Sydney Morning Herald \(Sydney\)](#), [The Age \(Online\)](#), [WA Today \(Online\)](#).

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## More bulk-billing docs but rates soar

Courier Mail, General News, 23/02/2026, Ellen Ransley, Page 10

Bulk-billing rates in Queensland have increased by almost 7 per cent in the past year. [...] Health Minister Mark Butler said "over the past year, we've made sure more Australians find it easier to find a bulk-billing doctor".

Also reported by: [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#), [Herald Sun \(Online\)](#), [Adelaide Now \(Online\)](#), [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#).

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## Health cover hike a blow for budgets

West Australian, Business News, 23/02/2026, Rowan Jones, Page 29

Millions of household budgets will take another hit with the biggest rise in health insurance costs in years, but most people are expected to still hang onto their policies. An average premium increase of 4.41 per cent was approved by Health Minister Mark Butler last week, which experts say could trigger many families to look at downgrading their cover to save money.

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## Private health insurers lure new customers with gift cards and extras waivers as battle for dollars heats up

West Australian, Other, 22/02/2026, Rhianna Mitchell

Private health funds are trying to lure new customers with gift cards, zero wait periods and free insurance for up to 14 weeks as soaring premiums prompt Australians to consider downgrading or switching their cover. [...] Announcing the increase this week, Federal Health Minister Mark Butler said he expected insurers and hospitals to work hard to bring down costs and keep future price increases to a minimum.

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## Childhood vaccination rates are declining in Australia. Why?

The Guardian, Other, 22/02/2026, Natasha May

When researchers asked Australian parents whether they had heard anything recently about childhood vaccination that worried them, one in seven (14%) said yes. [...] The health minister, Mark Butler, said governments across the world were grappling with the "alarming" decline in childhood vaccination.

[Read More](#)

[Back to Top](#)

## MINISTER MCALLISTER

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[Back to Top](#)

## MINISTER RAE

No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

## ASSISTANT MINISTER MCBRIDE

## Group helps Zoe process grief of losing son

Burnie Advocate, General News, 23/02/2026, Rodney Woods, Page 7

"i just felt lost." That is the reason Somerset's Zoe Poutoukalis reached out for support after the death of her son about three years ago. [...] Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Emma McBride said it would offer "a safe and welcoming place to access mental health".

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[Back to Top](#)

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[Back to Top](#)

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[Back to Top](#)

## DEPARTMENT

### 'Buddy' AI a winner for Uniting

Pulse+IT, Other, 23/02/2026, Heather Fletcher

Uniting nsw & ACT says its generative AI assistant "Buddy" is now live in production across 1,000 community care workers, with staff reporting time savings of up to two hours a day through reduced administration. Twelve months after first outlining the concept publicly, the not-for-profit says the tool has moved from pilot to frontline deployment, with measurable impact on documentation workflows and multilingual support.

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### How GPs plan to end Medicare politics and change bulk billing for good

WA Today, Other, 22/02/2026, Natassia Chrysanthos

Australia's GPs want the federal government to butt out of Medicare funding, saying decisions about rebates and prices should be delegated to an independent body to avoid the politicisation of healthcare. The call from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners would dampen future , ruling out such initiatives as the \$8.

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[Back to Top](#)

## AGEING AND AGED CARE

### Means testing doesn't equal affordability in aged care

Canberra Times, Business News, 23/02/2026, Noel Whittaker, Page 13

The big question now facing many retirees is whether to join the bank of mum and dad and help their children into a home. I've long believed that, if you can afford it, helping sooner rather than later makes sense. [...] The most expensive financial commitment they are ever likely to face isn't something glamorous like a Ferrari - it's aged care.

Also reported by: [Bendigo Advertiser \(Bendigo\)](#), [Ballarat Courier \(Ballarat\)](#).

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## Seniors face a deeming wipe-out

West Australian, Business News, 23/02/2026, Nick Bruining, Page 18

A lift in deposit rates coupled with the "normalisation" of Centrelink deeming rates will spell bad news for thousands of income-tested part-pensioners, allowance recipients and Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders. [...] Financial assets include all bank accounts, cash, shares, managed investments, bullion, account-based pension funds and super accumulation funds for those over age-pension age.

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## Promoting social connections for better mental health in older adults

Medical Journal of Australia, Other, 23/02/2026, Suraj Samtani

Social connections are key predictors of mental health in older adults, especially interactions with friends, neighbours and the wider community. GPs are well placed to screen for social isolation and encourage patients to remain socially active as part of healthy ageing and depression prevention.

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[Back to Top](#)

## DISABILITY AND CARERS

### 'I did this to help and now I'm the one who's going to need help': NDIS call handlers describe pressure cooker workplace

The Guardian, Other, 23/02/2026, Jonathan Barrett

There is a checklist of horrors that call handlers on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) phone lines hear about. [...] "That call centre is detrimental to the health and safety of our participants and their representatives," says an experienced employee of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

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[Back to Top](#)

## PRIMARY CARE

### GP squeeze, flat tax: no price tag on grievance

The Australian, General News, 23/02/2026, Greg Brown, Page 1

One Nation MP Barnaby Joyce says metropolitan-based GPs should be barred from participating in Medicare unless they spend a period of time practising in the regions, downplaying the impact of bulk-billing rates by declaring there was an "an abundance of doctors in the cities". [...] While warning Australians face a choice to "either go broke or we trim" government spending, Mr Joyce said Pauline Hanson's populist party would be prepared to show the political bravery to propose spending cuts in the public service, health, education and the NDIS.

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### Plan for future? It's flat-earth thinking

The Australian, General News, 23/02/2026, Page 1

From flat income taxes to withholding Medicare services provider numbers from new doctors who don't practise in the regions, One Nation's wafer-thin policies owe more to flat-Earth thinking than the rigours of government. In an interview with Greg Brown, Nationals turncoat and One Nation MP Barnaby Joyce has resurrected Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's flat-tax proposal from the ludicrous Joh for PM campaign in 1987. At the time, prime minister Bob Hawke rightly dismissed it as "pie-in-the-sky nonsense".

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## GPs still receive less funding per person

Why has the federal government spent less per person on doctors in the ACT than any other state or territory every year in the past decade? Theories range from Canberra having a younger and healthier population to high fees deterring patients and fewer Medicare rebates for the ACT.

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## Regional health alliance back on track

Border Mail, General News, 23/02/2026, Chelsea Wilson, Page 5

Tensions within a regional health alliance have been labelled a "misunderstanding" as the search for a hospital lobbyist pivots. Wodonga mayor and regional health alliance chair Michael Gobel soothed concerns from Federation Council that its \$8138 contribution to the alliance would miss the mark for its community.

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## Hospital car parking: it's back to the drawing board as request for funding rejected

Bathurst Western Advocate, Other, 23/02/2026, Jacinta Carroll

Plans to ease parking congestion at Bathurst Base Hospital have again fallen flat after the NSW Government rejected an application to fund a temporary car park at Victoria Park. Bathurst Regional Council made a request for around \$2 million to build a temporary car park in Victoria Park, opposite the hospital, which would accommodate 200 cars, but the request for funding has been knocked back.

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[Back to Top](#)

## POPULATION HEALTH

### Delivery fails for sunburnt posties

Townsville Bulletin, General News, 23/02/2026, Clareese Packer, Page 6

Australia Post workers have been urged to stop wearing their new uniforms following reports staff are getting sunburnt through the fabric of new polo shirts while on the job. [...] "Australia Post has engaged an official Australia federal government agency, ARPANSA (Australian Radiation Protection & Nuclear Safety Agency), to test the fabric to ensure it meets the SPF50 rating," the spokesperson said.

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### Kids' caffeine hit cause for alarm

Gold Coast Bulletin, General News, 23/02/2026, Tamara Mcdonald, Page 21

Kids are consuming alarming amounts of caffeine, with doctors reporting teens drinking up to four cups of matcha a day and primary school aged children having energy drinks before morning classes. And young people often don't even realise they're ingesting the stimulant, which can negatively affect sleep and mental health.

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[Back to Top](#)

## CHRONIC CONDITIONS AND SCREENING

### St Vincent's launches major oncology unit to tackle regional cancer outcomes.

The Courier Mail, Other, 22/02/2026, Staff writer

A new cancer centre and oncology unit has been unveiled for the people of the Darling Downs. St Vincent's Private Hospital reported on Friday the inclusion of the new centre, which includes a 12-chair oncology unit with a team of experienced cancer care specialist doctors and support staff.

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## A simple tool to predict dementia risk after stroke

Medical Journal of Australia, Other, 23/02/2026, Jess Lo

A new calculator tool offers clinicians a quick, evidence-based way to identify patients at higher risk of post-stroke dementia, supporting earlier intervention and, ultimately, helping stroke survivors maintain independence and quality of life for as long as possible. A stroke occurs every 11 minutes in Australia. It remains one of the nation's biggest killers, but for the estimated 440,000 Australians living with the effects of stroke, survival marks the beginning of a long and often challenging recovery.

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## 2GB, Healthy Living, 22/02/2026, Dr Ross Walker & Ned Green

Interview with Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO Maria Said. Between 2015 and 2020, Australian hospitals saw a 50 per cent jump in emergency presentations for anaphylaxis. Said says nasal spray is vital for people living with severe allergies, noting that it is needle-free.

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## 2GB, Weekends, 22/02/2026, Jason Morrison

Interview with vascular surgeon Dr Geoff Lester. Among about 500 Australians surveyed, 83 per cent are worried shingles could disrupt their everyday life, while half said they've never discussed shingles with a healthcare professional. Lester says it is important for people to be assessed by a GP for shingles risk to see possible interventions or vaccines for the infection. He claims that shingles is a risk factor for worsening cardiovascular disease and dementia.

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[Back to Top](#)

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

### Grieving families sue hospitals over suicide deaths of loved ones

Age, General News, 23/02/2026, Henrietta Cook, Page 1

At least 40 Victorians are preparing to launch legal action against the state's hospitals over claims their loved ones died by suicide after being prematurely discharged or denied critical care. [...] Mental health-related emergency department presentations are also on the rise, increasing by almost a third over the past decade, according to Victorian Health Department data.

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### Mental health ward crisis

Daily Telegraph, General News, 23/02/2026, Madeleine Bower, Page 3

The crisis at a beleaguered western Sydney hospital has deepened after a third patient fled the mental health ward, three days after the state government launched an urgent review of the facility in response to two earlier escapes. [...] Mental Health Minister Rose Jackson launched an urgent review into Cumberland Hospital following revelations in The Daily Telegraph that two men had separately escaped the mental health hospital within 24 hours of each other days before allegedly killing three people between them.

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### Man absconds from troubled hospital days after two escapees allegedly kill people

Sydney Morning Herald, Other, 22/02/2026, Sally Rawsthorne

A psychiatric inpatient has absconded from a Sydney hospital just three days after the state's mental health minister initiated an "urgent review" into its security in response to two escapees allegedly killing people in separate incidents last week. Madan Pandey, 25, was an inpatient at the troubled Cumberland Hospital when he absconded on Saturday morning.

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## Patients three times more likely to escape from Cumberland Hospital, data shows

ABC Online, Other, 22/02/2026, Tony Ibrahim & Rhiannon Soliman-Marron

Patients are three times more likely to abscond from Cumberland Hospital than from any other mental health unit in the state, data shows. The facility, the largest in Australia, has become the subject of a formal investigation this week, after two patients who escaped from its care within 24 hours went on to allegedly cause three people's deaths.

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## The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement still falls short

Medical Journal of Australia, Other, 23/02/2026, David McGrath

In November, the Productivity Commission released its final report on the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (the National Agreement). It found that while some good work is being done, the National Agreement hasn't provided the vision and direction we need to build the mental health system that we all want.

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[Back to Top](#)

## IMMUNISATION

### On the frontlines of Australia's fight against vaccine hesitancy

ABC Online, Other, 22/02/2026, Hayley Gleeson

Addressing vaccine hesitancy requires skill and patience – some days, the people who do it feel like they're drowning in a sea of lies. Since her four-week-old son Riley died of whooping cough in 2015, and she began a new career in immunisation advocacy, Catherine Hughes has kept her finger on the pulse of what Australians are thinking and saying about vaccines.

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[Back to Top](#)

## HEALTH SYSTEMS STRATEGIES

### Crook books: hospitals facing financial battles

Border Mail, General News, 23/02/2026, Hana Humboldt, Page 2

It's feared uncertainty over health services' finances will only add to the challenge of retaining staff. [...] In August 2025, the National Rural Health Alliance reported a funding gap that showed rural Australians were missing out on \$1090.47 in healthcare funding per person every year, compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

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[Back to Top](#)

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No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

## FIRST NATIONS HEALTH

## Research into rare genetic diseases in First Nations communities receives \$9.3m boost

Northern Territory News, Other, 22/02/2026, Emma Cam

A rare genetic disease that causes loss of mobility, speech, and can shorten life in First Nations communities has received \$9.3 million in national research funding to help find a cure. Machado-Joseph Disease and Spinocerebellar Ataxia Type 7 are inherited conditions that cause gradual incoordination, imbalance, and visual impairment, ultimately leading to the loss of mobility, speech, swallowing, and, in some cases, early death.

Also reported by: [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#).

[Read More](#)

[Back to Top](#)

## PUBLIC HOSPITAL AND HEALTH REFORM

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[Back to Top](#)

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No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

## HEALTH WORKFORCE

### Doctors crook on hospital fatigue

Herald Sun, General News, 23/02/2026, Sarah Booth, Page 1

Doctors' lengthy shifts and excessive workloads are putting public hospital patients at risk and must be urgently addressed, their union says. Public hospital doctors are calling for their new EBA to include fatigue measures such as banning shifts longer than 12.5 hours and a 30 per cent pay rise over four years.

Also reported by: [Adelaide Now \(Online\)](#), [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#).

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### Doctors reject wages offer

Northern Territory News, General News, 23/02/2026, Zizi Averill, Page 3

Territory doctors have given the government a sombre diagnosis on their latest pay deal, with 82 per cent of medical officers rejecting a "stagnant" wages offer. On Friday, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation Northern Territory confirmed 454 doctors voted to rejected the NT government's four-year enterprise agreement offer.

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### Ready for health service

Courier Mail, General News, 23/02/2026, Vishaak Gangasandra, Page 13

A record-breaking cohort of nurses and midwives have been welcomed at Queensland's largest non-profit hospital network this week as the state battles critical healthcare workforce shortages. A total of 211 graduates finished their first week on the job at 11 of Mater's public and private hospitals across Brisbane, Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg and Townsville.

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### LGH's new nurses ready to build skills

Launceston Examiner, General News, 23/02/2026, Lauren Richardson, Page 3

More than 100 new medical students and health professionals are the "workforce our region desperately needs". Twenty new medical students are starting at UTAS in February, the first cohort able to complete their entire medical degree in Launceston.

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[Back to Top](#)

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No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

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No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

## BENEFITS INTEGRITY

No relevant coverage

[Back to Top](#)

## AUSTRALIAN CDC

### **ABC News, Weekend Breakfast, 22/02/2026, Kathryn Robinson & Johanna Nicholson**

New South Wales Health is advising Sydneysiders to be on alert for symptoms of measles after two new cases were identified. The latest cases travelled while unknowingly infectious to several sites across the city, including Sydney Airport and Northern Beaches Hospital. There's currently an increased risk in New South Wales, with 17 cases confirmed this year.

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[Back to Top](#)

## THERAPEUTIC GOODS ADMINISTRATION

### **Text exposes big problem with peptides amid rise in popular trend**

Adelaide Now, Other, 22/02/2026, David Wu

Keeping a youthful appearance is the dream for many people, but one nursed has sounded the alarm on a growing trend that has left some botched. [...] In a statement to news.com.au, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) continues to be concerned about the health and safety of Australians who access unapproved therapeutic products without consulting a qualified health professional.

Also reported by: [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#).

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### **Channel 10, 10 News (Weekend), 22/02/2026, Georgie Tunny**

There are warnings about the rise of fake Botox imports, with Australian patients unknowingly putting themselves at risk of serious injury or even death. The Therapeutic Goods Administration continues to see counterfeit Botox imported into the country, issuing specific alerts for vials with batch numbers

C8478C4, C7211C4, and HA33946. Patients are advised to always undertake a detailed consultation with a licenced professional before undergoing any treatment.

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[Back to Top](#)

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[Back to Top](#)

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[Back to Top](#)

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[Back to Top](#)

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