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ALP vows big spend for Victorian health

Bianca Hall

Victoria's community health centres are set to receive \$40 million for badly needed upgrades if Labor wins office next month, starting with four key electorates.

The funding package, to be announced today, would allow ageing community health centres – many built in the 1960s and 1970s – to be upgraded and expanded.

Opposition spokeswoman Catherine King said community health centres often served as a first port of call for people seeking medical, mental health and social supports, despite having no regular source of capital funding.

As a result, she said, many centres were constrained by ageing and ill-suited buildings, in which staff struggled to meet demand.

All Victorian community health centres would be able to apply for a share of the \$40 million pool, but Labor has identified four projects that would win initial funding if it wins office – in Ringwood, Parkdale, Prahran and Sunbury.

EACH Community Health, based in Ringwood, in Liberal Michael Sukkar's electorate of Deakin, would win \$5.2 million for the construction of new GP, allied health and nursing facilities.

Mr Sukkar holds Deakin by 6.4 per cent, after last year's redistribution increased his margin



from 5.7 per cent, but an increasingly confident Labor has set its sights on the seat – including launching its federal campaign in a suburban backyard in Mitcham.

Ms King said EACH Community Health has served the Maroondah community for more than 40 years, but the centre was struggling to meet demand and the local population was forecast to grow by 15 per cent by 2035.

She said Labor would also invest \$7 million in a new children's centre at Central Bayside Community Health Service's Parkdale site, in shadow attorney general Mark Dreyfus' seat of Isaacs.

The centre would provide a range of health services, but primarily cater for children with developmental difficulties.

Mr Dreyfus' margin was sliced from 5.7 per cent to a knife-edge notional 3 per cent in last year's redistribution.

Star Health in Prahran would

win \$4 million for a Mental Health Community Hub, in the blue-ribbon seat of Higgins.

The money would pay for a two-floor addition to the existing community health service. Labor says the expanded facility would cater particularly for at-risk groups, including domestic violence victims, the LGBTI community, and people suffering from mental health issues.

The Liberal Party holds Higgins, which is losing popular MP Kelly O'Dwyer to retirement, on a notional 7.4 per cent margin over The Greens' Jason Ball, after redistribution.

But the emergence of high-profile barrister Fiona McLeod, SC, as Labor's star candidate could complicate the race.

Finally, Labor has vowed to spend \$2.5 million on a children's health hub in Sunbury, to be run by Sunbury Community Health.

Ms King said the first stage of the hub would bring together various health services, including speech and language pathology, audiology, paediatric occupational therapy and physiotherapy, into one place. It would focus on early intervention and treatment.

Labor's Rob Mitchell holds McEwen, which includes the growing city of Sunbury, on a notional 6 per cent margin after last year's redistribution.