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AUSTRALIA SHOULD BE WORLD’S HEALTHIEST COUNTRY

AMA releases Vision for Australia’s health

The AMA will lay out its vision for the future of the Australian health system in a major speech to the National Press Club today, with the goal of making Australia the healthiest nation in the world.

The AMA’s *Vision for Australia’s Health* looks beyond the pandemic and provides a blueprint to secure a robust, sustainable health system for decades to come with high quality, patient-centred care at its heart.

The vision outlines areas of the health system in need of reform based around five policy pillars - general practice, public hospitals, private health and an equitable, innovative health system for all - underpinned by a bedrock of core principles supporting a stronger health system.

The AMA says reform in these areas will relieve financial pressure and demand on the healthcare system while improving the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid’s Press Club speech will shift focus from COVID-19 to the pressing need for a sustained, preventative health strategy to free up hospitals and tackle the main burden to the health system – chronic disease.

“While it’s right that we deal with COVID-19, we equally need to address the other pandemic we’re living with and have grown accustomed to – chronic disease and obesity in particular,” Dr Khorshid said.

“I want to lift our eyes beyond the immediate, and focus on a healthier future for all Australians, and I want to propose the goal of becoming the healthiest country in the world.

“I believe this is a realistic goal and should be our collective aim, but to achieve it, we must overcome the ‘short-termism’ of governments with their eye on the 24-hour news cycle, the next election win and the buck passing of federalism.

“In the absence of any real vision for securing the long-term health of our nation, most recently on display in the May budget, the AMA is providing it in our *Vision for Australia’s Health*,” Dr Khorshid said.

Spiraling chronic disease accounts for two-thirds of the overall burden of disease in Australia and data show 13.4 million Australian adults (67 per cent) are obese or overweight. In First Nations populations, 74 per cent of adults and 38 per cent of children are obese or overweight.

“We cannot expect an under-funded system to absorb the late-stage complications of an ageing, chronically ill and obese society,” Dr Khorshid said.

“If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s that our health system is the backbone of our economic success.

“During the pandemic we’ve let medicine and experts lead the way, and we’re enjoying one of the strongest economies globally as a result. Investing in healthcare really is the best thing we can do for our society and our economy.

“For too long health reform has been stagnant or piecemeal. Now is the time for a comprehensive plan to be put forward, funded and implemented and the AMA’s *Vision for Australia’s Health* is that plan.

“Our vision will see us leading with solutions and continue campaigning on aged care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, urgent reforms to public hospital funding, our long-time call for a tax on sugary drinks, and rebuilding the value and sustainability of private practice in Australia.”

Main points:

The AMA’s *Vision for Australia’s Health* is built around five pillars of detailed policy reform.

General Practice: Bolstering General Practice. Primary healthcare professionals control or influence 80 per cent of healthcare costs, yet spending on General Practice accounts for only eight per cent of total government health spending. We will continue to campaign for increased access to high quality General Practice for people in nursing homes for better support for GPs who visit nursing home patients.

Public hospitals: Our public hospitals are overwhelmed. We are seeing nationwide ambulance ramping resulting in avoidable harm. Our vision is for an evolved and adequately funded public hospital sector, providing for timely elective and emergency treatment, greater linkages to primary care and more transparent and simplified Commonwealth-State funding arrangements.

Private health: Falling private health insurance membership especially amongst young people over 20 successive quarters has left the private health system underfunded and ailing. Our vision is for a reinvigorated and resilient private health system, which complements the public hospital system by providing high-quality, timely and affordable care in a sustainable way. The AMA will broker a summit of private health sector leaders to drive a reform agenda.

A health system for all: Our proud system of equality in Australian healthcare should be defended and maintained. Our vision is for a sustainable health system achieved via policy and sustainable funding reform with prevention the foundation of healthcare planning and design. Access for all Australians remains a key feature of our system, including identifying and filling service gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with mental health needs, people living in aged care settings and other vulnerable groups, in conjunction with the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

A health system for the future: Embracing new technology and innovation, better use of data and technology, consolidating the gains from COVID-19 reforms, and building upon them to facilitate better access for all patients.

A set of six core principles the AMA considers necessary for success in health reform underpin the five pillars are:

Access to appropriate healthcare for all Australians

Independence of the medical profession

A sustainable medical workforce and health system

Quality in the medical system

Patient empowerment to ensure people can take charge of their health

Fostering medical leadership

The AMA's *Vision for Australia's Health* will be available during the National Press Club address from 1230 PM Wednesday 9 June 2021.

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