

Transcript: AMA President, Professor Steve Robson Press Conference, Tuesday, 4 October 2022

Subject: AMA seven-point plan to revitalise General Practice

PROF STEVE ROBSON: Good morning, I want to kick off this morning by acknowledging that we are speaking on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and any Indigenous Australians present I want to acknowledge you and your leaders past, present and emerging.

STEVE ROBSON: General practice is the beating heart of healthcare in Australia and I'm here this morning to launch the AMA's seven-point plan to revitalise general practice in this country. General practice is one of the most efficient parts of the healthcare system in Australia, and we know that 85 per cent of Australians will see a GP every year. But overall expenditure by the Government is relatively modest.

A few weeks ago, Federal Health Minister Mark Butler said the most frightening figure he saw in healthcare was that only one in seven young doctors want to become general practitioners. We agree with that 100 per cent, and we want to turn that around completely.

Ahead of the GP summit being held in Canberra this week, the AMA has a seven-point plan that deals with all of the key issues necessary to revitalise healthcare in Australia through general practice at the moment.

Australians recognise that it's difficult to access affordable general practice, and if you think it's a problem in urban areas, it's an even greater problem for rural and regional Australia. If you think that general practice is difficult to access in cities, then it's an even greater problem for rural and regional Australians, so we need to revitalise general practice for the entire country as soon as we can.

The AMA's seven-point plan deals with the financial sustainability and viability of general practices in the country, and again will make general practice a desired career pathway for the clever young doctors. And we need at least half of all Australia's young medical graduates to want to become and to join general practice in this country.

With major stresses on the financial viability of general practice in Australia, we have a plan that will put them back on an even keel to allow them to keep their doors open and provide the services that Australians expect from their doctors. We also have a plan that will make general practice viable as a career option for young doctors.

STEVE ROBSON: The tenets of funding for general practice as we see it at the moment were actually developed 40 years ago and the landscape of health in this country has changed enormously. It's now time to change the financial funding models for general practice to make it financially viable and sustainable in this country. We need to make sure that if we do have general practitioners, that they are at their peak of productivity and we can do that by surrounding them with a team of people who can provide care for patients and make each general practitioner highly productive. We want to make general practice the peak pathway

for young doctors and we can do that by models of funding so that young doctors who are training as GPs are not at a financial disadvantage compared to their colleagues who are working in public hospitals training.

QUESTION: Yeah. So Professor Robson, as part of this, are we talking about increasing the Medicare rebate?

STEVE ROBSON: A restructuring of the way general practice is funded is absolutely critical at the moment. We know that \$750 million has been committed over the next four years and we see that as a down payment on ensuring the viability and particularly the financial viability of practices moving forward.

QUESTION: So are we talking about extra funding on top of the \$750 million that the government's already provided?

STEVE ROBSON: The \$750 million that the government provided for general practice is a great down payment but an enormous amount more is needed if we're going to keep the system that Australians have come to expect for their healthcare.

QUESTION: And have you had discussions with the Minister's office about this- your plan?

STEVE ROBSON: It's critical that we engage with the Federal Health Minister and all of the points in our plan have been extensively discussed with the Minister and the Department.

QUESTION: And so is this plan something that you'll be putting forward to the RACGP Summit this week- tomorrow?

STEVE ROBSON: The General Practice Summit that's beginning here in Canberra this week is another important first step, and these seven points that we have form the basis of our plan that we're putting forward to that Summit.

QUESTION: And so if we're talking extra funding, is that a reasonable ask given the deficit the current government is facing?

STEVE ROBSON: It's absolutely critical that we understand that general practice spending is an investment and not a cost. And if we invest in general practice, it will help ease the logjam and the enormous pressures on public hospitals by keeping Australians healthy and keeping them out of hospital.

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