



Friday, 28 April 2023

Steps towards primary care reform welcome, but May budget will be the test of government's commitment to general practice

The AMA welcomes the directions set out by the Commonwealth Government today, as first steps towards the reform of primary care and efforts to strengthen the role of general practice in our health system.

AMA President, Professor Steve Robson said these initiatives respond to the work of the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce that was completed last year.

“My Medicare, a system of voluntary patient enrolment, should reinforce the central role of general practice in the care of patients, ensuring patient care is well coordinated as part of a GP-led approach to the delivery of care.

“While it is important that other health professionals can work to their full potential, this should not be allowed to fragment patient care,” Professor Robson said.

The government has also flagged tailored funding packages for patients in addition to existing Medicare funding arrangements. The AMA has strongly emphasised that new funding models in general practice must build on existing fee-for-service arrangements and has rejected any moves to UK-style capitation.

“The AMA particularly welcomes plans to increase and index funding under the Workforce Incentive Program (WIP), which is critical to expanding access to multidisciplinary care through General Practice – something the AMA has pushed for strongly in our [Modernise Medicare campaign](#).

“We eagerly await further details of these changes to the WIP in the upcoming budget, recognising the government has committed to also providing funding for unregistered nurses to return to work in primary care, as well as the expansion of placements in primary care for nursing students.

“The AMA will now work closely with the government to finalise the details of My Medicare along with plans to improve access to after-hours GP services, GP services in aged care and the expansion of multidisciplinary care to ensure GPs are properly supported in caring for patients.

“The proposed National Scope of Practice Review will also be an important opportunity to discuss why states and territories have bypassed agreed national processes as well as Therapeutic Goods Administration scheduling decisions with respect to pharmacist prescribing.

“While today's announcement and discussions at National Cabinet reflect a growing understanding of the importance of General Practice and primary care in our health system – the May budget will be a real test for the Commonwealth. It not only needs to deliver funding to support long term reform of general practice, it must also deliver an immediate injection of funding into general practice to ensure it remains viable and GP services are accessible and affordable,” Professor Robson said.

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