

MEDIA RELEASE

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'More of the same' ACT urgent care clinics ignore federal government policy

The final plan for ACT Medicare urgent care clinics, announced today, does not align with federal government policy and is proceeding despite concerns from local GPs.

The federal Australian Medical Association and ACT AMA have written to federal Health Minister Mark Butler saying the plan outlined for Canberra clinics will do little to address healthcare access issues in the capital and won't do anything to improve access to GP care when a patient needs to be seen urgently.

AMA federal President Professor Steve Robson said the consultation process conducted by ACT Health in the lead up to the decision to rebrand existing walk-in clinics as urgent care centres had been woeful and the concerns of local GPs had been ignored.

"What we have is an ACT Government driven rebranding of existing centres led by nurse practitioners, which doesn't align with the federal government's own policy of these centres being led by GPs working collaboratively with other health professionals," Professor Robson said.

"This clearly reflects the ACT Government's ideological need to market its nurse practitioner led network of clinics despite the only available evaluation of these showing they are expensive and do not alleviate pressure on emergency departments."

ACT AMA President elect Dr Kerrie Aust said the decision to proceed with the ACT Government plan was another missed opportunity to invest in general practice at a time when the sector is struggling.

"Our joint submission with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners to an ACT Health consultation about the proposal outlined concerns at the direction being proposed," Dr Aust said.

"The ACT Government decision to impose this model is extraordinarily disappointing, with thoughtful input from ACT AMA ignored and local GPs written out the model."

Dr Aust said ACT AMA had recommended the clinics should be much more in keeping with the Commonwealth's policy intent and the published Commonwealth Operational Guidance for Urgent Care Clinics.

"ACT AMA previously expressed the view that the ACT Government's model was being presented as a done deal and not one that would be developed in consultation with local GPs, and that's exactly what's happened.

"This is despite Operational Guidance making it clear that these clinics were intended to be GP-led, with GPs working in collaboration with other health professionals to deliver high quality services to patients.

"It appears the ACT Government has very little understanding of the role and importance of general practice. This has become obvious in recent months in the commentary of the Chief Minister with respect to payroll tax.

"We understand the issues in accessing primary care in the ACT, which is why we recommended bolstering the existing CALMS service or placing additional nurses in practices already operating for extended hours. Nurse practitioners do an amazing job. But this decision will only further fragment the health system and lead to duplication of care and extra costs."

The AMA had engaged in the development of Urgent Care Clinic Operational Guidelines and the move to walk these back undermines trust and potentially makes future primary care reform discussions more difficult.

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