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EXTRA HOME CARE PACKAGES WELCOME, BUT NOT ENOUGH

The AMA has welcomed the Government’s announcement of 6,000 extra high need home care packages, following the release of the *Legislated Review of Aged Care 2017* Report, but says more packages are desperately needed.

Health Minister Greg Hunt and Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt announced the extra packages, along with the long-overdue announcement of \$20 million to go towards fixing the inefficient My Aged Care information system yesterday.

AMA Vice President, Dr Tony Bartone, said he was pleased that the Review, led by David Tune AO, PSM, had adopted a number of the AMA’s recommendations, particularly around improving the My Aged Care information technology system.

But he said that the 6,000 extra home care packages, while welcome, fell well short of demand.

“The *Home Care Packages Program Data Report* released today notes that at 30 June 2017, there were 53,750 people seeking home care who had not yet been assigned a home care package,” Dr Bartone said.

“While the extra places are welcome, they won’t go far in tackling the enormous backlog of applications.

“These are for people who are being cared for in the community, and their carers are doing it tough. It’s one thing to improve the IT system, but we still need beds and packages.”

Dr Bartone said that the AMA is a strong supporter of digital health for the delivery of better health care, but the IT technology has to work.

“In its submission to the Review, the AMA outlined the multiple inefficiencies with My Aged Care,” he said.

“In its current form, My Aged Care cannot satisfactorily handle electronic referrals from GPs, forcing them to resort to outdated methods like fax machines.

“The online form for an ACAT referral is not linked with clinical software, so it can’t be auto-populated with the GP’s clinical records, or be directly saved to the patient record.

“Instead, it has to be saved as an external document and attached, creating a significant administrative burden for already time-limited GPs.

“The AMA has repeatedly raised these concerns with the Department of Health, both through the Review, and through direct communication with the Department.

“Improving communication with My Aged Care contact centre staff is essential to avoid missing vital information on a patient’s application form, which has considerably delayed care in the past. The Tune Report recommends that the National Screening and Assessment Form should be revised.

“The Government has predicted that the proportion of Australians aged 65 years of age and older will increase to 18 per cent by 2026.

“The aged care workforce needs to be properly equipped with the appropriate tools to deal with the challenges that this ageing population will bring.”

The AMA’s submission to the Review is available here: <https://ama.com.au/submission/ama-submission-department-aged-care-legislated-review-2016-17>

The *Legislated Review of Aged Care 2017* Report is available here: <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/legislated-review-of-aged-care-2017-report>

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