

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGES KEY ROLE OF GENERAL PRACTICE WITH MYEFO FUNDING

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the Government has rightly recognised and begun investing in the key role of general practice and GPs in primary care with new funding in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) statement.

The Government has announced \$318.3 million in new funding for general practice, which includes \$98 million in increased funding for GPs visiting residential aged care facilities, \$146.5 million for targeted improvements for after-hours GP services, and \$33.5 for GP telehealth services for rural patients.

Dr Bartone said the new funding is an initial down payment while the AMA works with the Government to explore other areas to help significantly strengthen general practice to meet the future demands of a growing and ageing population and more patients living longer with chronic and complex health conditions.

“This funding is a start, but so much more is needed to put general practice on a solid footing to continue to provide accessible and affordable high-quality primary care in the challenging years ahead,” Dr Bartone said.

“Today’s investments in MYEFO are very targeted, whereas general practice really needs an across the board funding injection.

“The AMA especially welcomes the acknowledgement of the important work of GPs in aged care.

“Older Australians in residential aged care deserve access to the same quality of care from their GP that they have enjoyed throughout their lives.

“This funding will help GPs continue to visit their older patients in aged care facilities.”

Dr Bartone said the Government has also provided extra funding to fast track the release of 10,000 high-level home care packages.

“These new home care packages will help because, as of September 2018, there were 126,732 people waiting for an approved home care package level that meets their care needs.

“With a waiting list that continues to increase each quarter, many more packages are needed.

“We need funding packages that reflect demand, and which ensure timely access to care so people can remain in their own home for as long as is appropriate.”

Dr Bartone said that today’s extra funding for GP visits to aged care facilities is positive, but could be undermined by the planned abolition of the Aged Care Access Incentive (ACAI) payment from May next year.

“The ACAI must be retained. Otherwise, services to the frail and elderly in aged care facilities will be put at risk. There is an ever-increasing tide of GPs who are signalling an end to their aged care facility visits.

“We look forward to working with the Government on the detail of today’s announcements.”

Dr Bartone said the MYEFO announcements and the Government’s commitment to further funding reform sends the right signal to general practice and all our hardworking GPs that the Government is listening and acknowledges the crucial role they play in communities right across the country.

“General practice is the most efficient part of the health system,” Dr Bartone said.

“GPs care for patients and families through all stages of life.

“With proper funding and support, GPs can do more to help keep patients out of hospital and save the health system money.”

Dr Bartone said that the MYEFO funding is a modest turnaround of years of neglect of general practice.

“Over the past decade, general practice has been subject to numerous funding cuts, including an extended freeze on Medicare rebates,” Dr Bartone said.

“The most recent Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2018 showed that Australian Government total expenditure on GP services per person grew by just 80 cents between 2015-16 and 2016-17 - from \$370.60 to \$371.40.

“The most recent AIHW *International health data comparisons 2018* report showed that Australian GPs have the lowest income per average wage among 15 OECD countries.

“We expect of a lot of our hard-working GPs, but successive Governments have clearly failed to deliver the level of investment required to support patients in accessing GP care.

“The April 2019 Budget will be the last before the Government heads to an election.

“We need to see further investment in all domains of general practice, including money to support longer consultations with patients, investment in quality improvement, and targeted funding for chronic disease management that improves access to care through a patient’s general practice.”

17 December 2018

CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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