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**COALITION MUST BACK MEDICARE CHRONIC DISEASE REFORMS WITH ‘MEANINGFUL’ FUNDS: AMA**

It is time for the Coalition to back its Health Care Home vision for complex and chronic care with a meaningful level of funding, the AMA has said.

AMA President Dr Michael Gannon said the Association welcomed the Government’s Health Care Home model of care, which could greatly improve outcomes for patients with complex and chronic illnesses, but warned it would be doomed to failure without greater investment.

“The Health Care Home is potentially one of the biggest reforms we have seen to Medicare in decades,” Dr Gannon said. “The AMA is keen to work with the Government to develop the model and make it a success.”

While the Government has allocated \$21 million for a trial of the system, this is not directed at services for patients. The AMA President cautioned that, with GPs already under substantial financial pressure, the Government would have to make a much more significant commitment to the trial for it to be a success.

“At a time when medical practices are already struggling with the effects of the Medicare rebate freeze and other funding cuts, the Government seems to expect that GPs will be able to deliver enhanced care for patients with no extra support,” Dr Gannon said.

“This approach simply does not add up, and will potentially doom the model to failure. GP engagement is vital if these reforms are to be implemented.

“As the Chair of the Government’s Primary Health Care Advisory Committee, Dr Steve Hambleton, recently pointed out, if the funding model is not right, GPs will not engage with the concept.

“We want the Health Care Home model to work, but the Government needs to back it with appropriate funding.”

Under the model, patients suffering from complex and chronic health problems will be able to voluntarily enrol with a preferred general practice, and funding will be provided based on clinical need.

Dr Gannon said that as the population aged, more people were living with complex and chronic illnesses, placing increasing demands on the health system.

“GPs are at the frontline in caring for such patients, helping them to manage their health and stay out of hospital,” he said.

“A properly funded Health Care Home model has the potential to both improve the care they receive and save scarce health funds.”

It is understood that at April’s Council of Australian Governments meeting, the Commonwealth failed to win State and Territory agreement to redirect around \$70 million a year from public hospital funding to support the Health Care Home trial, and the Budget failed to deliver equivalent funding in its place.

Dr Gannon said this suggested that the trial was now seriously underfunded.

“There is widespread support for the Health Care Home concept,” he said.

“General practice is the least expensive part of the health system and we know that with the right support GPs can do more to keep patients out of hospital and avoid unnecessary costs.

“However, international evidence shows that this requires investment and the Government is clearly failing on this score.”

Dr Gannon said he had taken the issue of greater investment in general practice to the very top of the Government.

“During a recent meeting with the Prime Minister, I made it clear that the Government needed to look at how it could better support quality general practice, and well targeted additional funding for the Health Care Home trial is part of that.”

Labor has announced it would commit \$100 million over two years to support its own trial of a health care home.

“While there is not yet enough detail of what is included in Labor’s policy, there is no doubt that this is the type of initial investment that the Coalition needs to consider.” Dr Gannon said.

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