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AMA WELCOMES FUNDING REPRIEVE FOR GENERAL PRACTICE

The AMA has welcomed the decision by Health Minister Sussan Ley to extend the deadline for general practices to comply with the new Practice Incentive Program (PIP) Digital Health Incentive to 31 January 2017.

This follows the AMA’s direct call to the Minister for a moratorium on the requirement that practices upload shared health summaries (SHS) for at least 0.5 per cent of their patients each quarter in order to qualify for the PIP Digital Health Incentive. This was introduced in May this year.

“This is a very welcome decision by the Minister,” AMA President Dr Michael Gannon said. “GPs are already under significant financial pressure from the Medicare rebate freeze and other funding cuts, and the last thing they needed was to also lose vital PIP incentive payments.”

Dr Gannon said the AMA had called for a moratorium amid mounting evidence that a large number of practices could not meet the new requirement in time. The PIP Digital Health Incentive has now been in place for a full quarter, and 1500 general practices have so far failed to meet their SHS upload target.

He said losing the PIP incentive payment would have been a body blow for many practices already struggling under the effects of the Medicare rebate freeze.

“If the Government had not relaxed its approach, close to a third of previously eligible general practices faced losing significant financial support,” Dr Gannon said.

“In many cases, practices would have been more than \$20,000 worse off.

“With so many already close to breaking point, this could have been disastrous.”

Dr Gannon said the AMA had made repeated representations to Ms Ley since June regarding the harm the PIP changes would inflict on GPs already burdened by the Medicare rebate freeze.

At its meeting in August, the AMA Federal Council adopted a resolution calling on the Federal Government to agree to a moratorium on the loss of PIP incentives for practices that fail to meet the new Digital Health Incentive requirements.

It also called on the Government to direct the Practice Incentive Program Advisory Group to undertake a review of the reasons why practices were unable to comply with these requirements, and make recommendations on how these might be addressed.

Dr Gannon said it was welcome that the Government had now heeded the views and advice of general practitioners and their representatives, and it was important that it continued to do so.

The Government had pushed ahead with its SHS requirements against the advice of all GP groups on the Department of Health’s Practice Incentive Program Advisory Group, and the AMA President said in future it should ensure that any changes to the PIP Digital Health Incentive were based on the advice of the Practice Incentive Program Advisory Group (PIPAG).

Dr Gannon said the medical profession strongly supported the Government's My Health Record, and the Minister's decision to extend the SHS requirement deadline would help shore up the goodwill of GPs to support its successful implementation.

"It is pleasing that the Minister has recognised the concerns that have been consistently raised by the profession, and this decision provides some breathing space for practices," Dr Gannon said.

"With adequate time, education, and support, many of the affected 1500 general practices may well begin to genuinely engage with the My Health Record, and eventually champion it.

"But it is important that the Government continues to review the implementation of the PIP Digital Health Incentive in consultation with PIPAG.

"We need to know why practices failed to comply, and ensure that any of these issues are addressed before the end of January deadline. If a large number of practices still cannot comply by the new deadline, we may still need to revisit the policy."

29 September 2016

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