



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

C/- PO Box 280 Deakin West ACT 2600 ABN 64 051 645 674
www.healthreform.org.au

Thursday 30 April 2015

Australia needs a stronger primary health care system and policy

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) is urging the Federal Government to develop a coherent national primary health care policy to guide decision-making in this sector nationwide. In a new position paper released today, AHCRA has urged governments to recognise that a stronger primary health care sector can increase the equity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our health care system and meet health care challenges of the future.

“Although Australia’s primary health care sector has undergone positive change in the last decades, even more important reforms are required,” said Tony McBride, Chair Australian Health Care Reform Alliance. “We need an overall policy to guide Australia towards a more equitable and effective primary health care system, one that is much more flexible than the current system. Primary health care in this context would empower health professionals and consumers to prioritise prevention, early intervention and provide flexible ongoing care in a way that would decrease the need for hospital admissions and keep people healthier in their communities for longer.”

AHCRA welcomes the Federal Minister of Health’s recent announcement of a review of Medicare’s Medical Benefits Schedule. However AHCRA urges the Minister to think more broadly than MBS item numbers and explore reforms that include moving away from a fee-for-service funding system, increasing the use of non-medical health care professionals and addressing the poor distribution of services, especially in rural Australia. Such initiatives will lead to more people getting the care they need in a timely and person-centred way from the right professional to help tackle chronic disease.”

“AHCRA believes we should be aiming for a more equitable, affordable system and notes that even with our universal system, Australia has one of the highest levels of consumer out-of-pocket expenses in the OECD. We should not be increasing payments for health practitioner visits, but finding more effective ways of spending our health dollars”, said Mr McBride.

AHCRA has outlined a range of short, medium and long-term strategies to create a more effective primary health care sector that can reshape the health system to be more equitable and sustainable.

These include: quarantining GP services from the introduction of private health insurance; restoring indexation to Medicare rebates; and monitoring the impact of the current funding changes such as the rebate freeze and the introduction of Primary Health Networks.

Over the next 2-3 years AHCRA recommends developing and trialling different funding models which promote high quality primary health care. AHCRA also recommend increasing the scope of practice for non-medical primary health care workers and promoting more team-based care; and engaging consumers in the development and implementation of models of person-centred care.

In the longer term governments should progressively implement funding mechanisms that promote prevention and care coordination, and implement flexible and evidence-based health workforce reforms.

