



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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Australia needs vision for a national health system not despair about the sustainability of healthcare funding

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) strongly supports the AMA's call for a clear national health strategy and a greater focus on preventive and primary care.

"AMA President Brian Owler's Press Club speech this week was a wakeup call for everyone about the impact of recent decisions and highlighted urgent issues requiring Federal Government attention. Foremost among these is the urgent need for a clear plan from the Government on its priorities to improve Australians' health and health care.

Apart from a focus on funding cuts with little evidence of their value and long term impacts, the Government has not articulated its values and intentions to tackle the variety of urgent issues reducing the effectiveness and fairness of our health systems" said Tony McBride, Chair AHCRA.

"AHCRA also supports Professor Owler's call for more, not less, investment in preventing illness".

AHCRA has previously welcomed the arrival of Health Minister Sussan Ley to the portfolio and her more consultative approach to policy development. However AHCRA remains concerned that several past decisions remain in place and that policy directions that are confusing at best, appear designed to disadvantage the most vulnerable members of the community.

"Saving money by randomly cutting services, such as funds to the States and Territories for public hospitals and funds for NGOs through the Department of Health's Flexible Funds Programs, appears to be the extent of the government's vision for health. This is going backwards, not forwards.

There are efficiencies which can be found to fund future growth before we need to resort to the unsustainable funding rhetoric and fear mongering about not being able to afford the healthcare the community demands. This means being smarter about what services we fund, not just cutting them.

AHCRA shares the AMA's concern about the continuing freeze on Medicare rebates which will inevitably mean GPs charging consumers more for their healthcare over time thus increasing the load on existing public services or leaving more people without care. This is already starting to occur as GPs introduce additional co-payments to remain viable or in some cases resort to closing practices.

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**AHCRA is a coalition of over 30 national and state organisations, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, rural and remote health, health services and consumer groups*