

United General Practice Australia

10 December 2008

Communiqué



The united voice of General Practice in Australia said 100,000 extra GP patient consultations could be performed every week with the reduction of just one hour in red tape.

General Practice peak bodies from throughout Australia meeting in Canberra today welcomed the Federal Government's program to overhaul the Medical Benefits Schedule and the commitment to improve patient access to General Practice services.



They agreed that expanding access to general practice services was an essential ingredient in improving the health of all Australians, particularly in relation to preventative health and the treatment of chronic and multiple diseases.

Cutting government red tape was identified as a key issue, freeing doctors to see more patients, and spend more time with patients with higher care needs.

GPs currently spend about nine hours a week meeting red-tape requirements. Cutting this burden will deliver benefits to patients. Every hour a GP spends doing paperwork equates to four patients who are denied access to a GP.



Maintaining the real value of patient rebates is another critical access issue. Patient rebates have not kept pace with average weekly earnings and CPI increases. This means that patient out of pocket costs go up and bulk billing rates go down.

The Government must increase patient rebates to ensure patients can continue to afford to see a doctor, particularly in difficult economic times.

The group said COAG recognised the need to index hospital funding to reflect the real costs of providing medical care. The same realistic recognition needs to be applied to patient Medicare rebates.



The group welcomed COAG's commitment to increased GP training numbers. This recognises the best means of addressing the present GP shortage is to train more GPs.

Further investment in infrastructure was required to ensure the broadest possible access to general practice services. The Health and Hospital Infrastructure Fund needs to prioritise investment in training and infrastructure in general practice.

Improving access to GPs for pregnant women was recognised as an important part of Australia's maternity services, particularly in rural and remote areas. The group said the Government's maternity services review needed to maintain a primary focus on the health outcomes of mothers and babies. Collaborative teams ensure the best possible outcomes.



The group recognised that government emphasis on preventative health was supported by improved access to general practice. Preventative health is an integral part of what general practice already does and all measures designed to increase access to, and time with, a GP would help patients live longer, healthier lives.

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