



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP**  
**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

8 July 2009

**Report Highlights Importance of Our GPs**

The Rudd Government welcomes a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which provides information on GP activity in Australia and underlines the importance of primary care.

The report *General practice in Australia, health priorities and policies 1998-2008* examines changes in the clinical activities of General Practitioners over the last decade and focuses on eight health conditions declared as national health priority areas.

With 115 million annual visits to GP practices, general practice is an essential component of a strong primary health care system. That is why the Government is supporting GPs and building the workforce by providing:

- \$148 million over five years for an additional 75 GP training places in 2009 and 100 new places in 2010, and to provide 22 Remote Vocational Training Scheme GP training places from 2011;
- 212 GP training places from 2011 to permanently increase the number of GP training places to more than 800 per annum from 2011 onwards – a 35 per cent increase on the Howard Government's cap of 600 places;
- an additional \$41.2 million over four years to encourage more junior doctors to become GPs by investing in high quality general practice training under the Prevocational General Practice Placement program; and
- an extra \$7.6 million over three years to modernise the funding formula for Divisions of General Practice, bringing total funding to the Divisions to more than \$220 million a year.

The report shows GPs are spending an increasing amount of time with older patients and managing more chronic diseases.

GPs are detecting twice as many new cases of Type 2 diabetes than in 1998, arranging 30 per cent more tests for Type 2 diabetes health problems and referring patients to allied health professionals at twice the rate of a decade ago.

GPs are also more likely to be monitoring other aspects of Type 2 diabetes patients' health, and treating these with prescriptions for lipid-lowering, anti-hypertensive and anti-platelet medications.

The report also highlights that the management of health problems amongst Indigenous Australians remains a critical concern. It notes the high prevalence of multiple risk factors in the Indigenous population and reinforces the growing need of early intervention programs.

The Rudd Government is committed to addressing these problems and provided almost \$1 billion was allocated in the recent Budget for health programs specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Within a new \$805.5 million chronic disease package, \$161 million will specifically target risk factors for chronic illness among Indigenous Australians, including harmful alcohol consumption, smoking, nutrition and exercise.

The report analyses 10 years of data collected through the Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) study of GP activity from 1998 to 2008 covering 990,000 GP-patient encounters. The Australian Government has contributed over \$3 million in funding support to the BEACH study over the ten year period.

**For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.**