



Strengthening Medicare Taskforce

Meeting 5 Communiqué

The Strengthening Medicare Taskforce held its fifth meeting on the traditional Country of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in Melbourne today.

Taskforce members came together to consider opportunities to strengthen the sustainability of general practice and primary care to ensure it is fit-for-purpose and supports Australia's current and future primary healthcare needs.

The critical importance of a sustainable general practice sector as the foundation for universal health coverage for all Australians was acknowledged. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce and extraordinary efforts of the sector over the pandemic was recognised.

Discussions focused on finding sustainable models for funding equitable access to primary care in the context of the growing prevalence of chronic illness, an ageing population, increasing underlying costs and a primary care workforce under stress.

The Taskforce stressed the importance of ensuring all Australians have equitable access to affordable primary care services, regardless of where they live and when they need care. The differences in access, needs and choice in different areas across Australia were highlighted and the need for services that respond to the needs of different communities across rural, remote, outer metropolitan and urban areas.

To support this discussion, the Taskforce received a presentation from the perspective of practice managers on opportunities to drive patient outcomes, workforce satisfaction and performance in general practice, highlighting ways of combining and redesigning funding streams to achieve quality and innovation.

The Taskforce discussed international evidence from blended funding models which has shown improved care coordination, improved health equity, decreased emergency department attendances and hospital admissions, and funds improved management of complex and chronic conditions.

The Taskforce acknowledged that shifting Australian general practice funding towards blended models could provide greater flexibility and support the delivery of multidisciplinary team-based care and meet the needs of patients in a variety of cohorts and settings.

The discussion focused on how funding models could best support general practice to service patients with complex needs, enable multidisciplinary team-based care, support innovative models that respond to differing needs in rural and regional Australia, and improve access to general practice, including in the after hours period, areas of market failure and for people who can't afford to pay. The Taskforce acknowledged the importance of also supporting nurse-led, allied health and other primary care business models that work alongside general practice to deliver primary healthcare services to the community. Opportunities to plan and undertake collaborative commissioning across Commonwealth, state and territory, and local governments were discussed.

Taskforce members agreed the need to improve the sustainability of general practice to respond to Australia's health needs, to improve access, especially in rural and remote areas and for disadvantaged populations, and to position general practice as an attractive option for the health care workforce.

The Strengthening Medicare Taskforce will meet in December to finalise recommendations to Government on the highest priorities to strengthen Medicare.

Chair

The Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP

25 November 2022, Melbourne