



## Strengthening Medicare Taskforce

### Meeting 6 Communiqué

The Strengthening Medicare Taskforce held its sixth and final meeting on the traditional country of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri People at the Australian Parliament House in Canberra today. Members discussed recommendations on the future of primary care in Australia and the highest priority investments in primary care in the immediate and longer term.

#### *1. Increasing access to equitable and affordable primary care*

Members agreed that person centred care must underpin a transition of Australia's world class universal primary healthcare system to more blended systems and funding over time, to better address increasingly complex and chronic patient needs and inequities in access and individual outcomes. Funding needs to recognise and support models of care that are responsive to local needs in outer metropolitan, rural and remote areas, and to enable multidisciplinary care including nurse-led, allied health and other primary care models. Members supported an increased focus on wrap-around care for those who need it and the importance of continuity of care.

#### *2. Encouraging multidisciplinary care*

Members supported greater use of multidisciplinary team-based care models in primary care. This will require all governments to work together to enable legislative and regulatory barriers to practitioners working to their full scope of practice to be reviewed and addressed, and to improve system integration and workforce planning at local and regional levels. Cultural change will enable healthcare professionals to work together across their full scope of practice, including through changes in education and training to ensure workers have the skills required to support an integrated, person-centred system.

#### *3. Modernising primary care through data and digital reform*

The Taskforce agreed the importance of a modern, digitally enabled and data driven primary care system. This will require critical reforms to My Health Record (MHR) to improve its functionality, scope of information uploaded, integration with clinical software systems, and improve access for a broader range of health professionals to provide better person centred outcomes. Better connection between different care systems (primary, secondary, tertiary, aged and disability care) should be prioritised, and linked datasets further developed to guide investment decisions and health system planning. Members recognised that systems need to be developed to ensure equitable access, noting that there are barriers to access for some individuals and areas. Members agreed on the need for governance structures to protect patient data, regulation of software providers, support data sharing and ensure standardisation across the primary care system.

#### *4. Supporting organisational and cultural change in the primary care sector*

Members agreed Australia has a strong primary care sector that provides essential care for Australians at all stages of life. Members agreed that delivering person centred care is the principle that underpins a strong health system and that consumer perspectives are central to developing and implementing any changes to the system. It was recognised that all levels of government play a part in strengthening Medicare. The Taskforce discussed the need for Primary Health Networks to play a larger role in supporting the primary care sector to provide continuity, coordination and connection for all primary care providers. Strategies are needed to engage consumers, particularly people from diverse population groups, in the co-design of models focused on their needs and to enable them to shape future reform.

*Next steps*

A final report will be drafted outlining the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce's immediate and future priorities for investment under the \$750 million Strengthening Medicare Fund and provided to Government by the end of 2022. The Chair thanked all Taskforce members for sharing their time and expertise throughout each of the Taskforce meetings, and for their passion to improve the primary health system.

**Chair**

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

**13 December 2022**

**Canberra**