



Health Ministers Meeting (HMM): *Communique* *20-21 July 2023*

Health Ministers from all Australian governments met in Canberra over 20-21 July 2023 to discuss a range of important issues for Australia’s healthcare system. These include: reforms to improve attraction and retention of health workforce, First Nations Health priorities, and an update on the mid-term review of the National Health Reform Agreement. Health Ministers also met with representatives from Australian Medical Colleges to discuss opportunities to improve registration and accreditation processes to benefit clinicians, patients, and our communities.

Health workforce reforms

Health Ministers met with Ms Robyn Kruk AO who updated them on her independent review of health practitioner regulatory settings. The review covers health practitioner registration, skill and qualification recognition for overseas trained health professionals and international students who have studied in Australia. Ministers welcomed Ms Kruk’s update and the recommendations outlined in her interim report which was endorsed by National Cabinet. Health Ministers agreed to implement the key recommendations made in the report, aimed at improving Australia’s standing as a destination of choice for overseas-trained healthcare workers. The Health Workforce Taskforce will lead the implementation in consultation with Ms Kruk and the sector.

Health Ministers noted the importance of engagement with Home Affairs in order to improve access to visas for overseas-trained healthcare workers, without which it would be impossible to advance the reform.

First Nations Health priorities

Ministers welcomed Ms Pat Turner, CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Health, to discuss First Nations Health priorities.

On 7 October 2022, Health Ministers convened the second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable in Adelaide to agree key priorities for First Nations Health, and this week they have reaffirmed their commitment to continue taking concerted action on these priorities in order to Close the Gap in health access and outcomes.

Of note was a commitment to improve health services for First Nations people in prisons, and for First Nations children in out-of-home care – both areas where access and outcomes trail the broader population, and which contribute adversely to the health of First Nations people.

Assistant Minister McCarthy also spoke to the importance of the Voice Referendum, and in particular the mental health impacts that the campaign is having on communities. Health Ministers support the Voice to Parliament, and are committed to working with communities, NACCHO and the First Nations health sector to improve health access and outcomes.

Ministers will reconvene the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable in mid-2024 to continue progressing actions and priorities to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians' health and life expectancy outcomes.

Mid-Term Review of the National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) Addendum 2020-2025

Health Ministers welcomed the independent reviewers appointed to conduct the mid-term review of the NHRA, Ms Rosemary Huxtable AO and Mr Michael Walsh PSM. Ms Huxtable and Mr Walsh noted the extensive consultation process for the review including 62 jurisdictional workshops, 35 targeted interviews, and 60 written submissions and case studies from jurisdictions and other organisations.

The review will continue over the coming months with the final report to be delivered to Health Ministers in October 2023. Noting Mr Walsh's appointment as the acting Director-General of Queensland Health from July 2023, Ms Huxtable alone will finalise the report.

The review will complement other critical health reform work including the Independent Review of Regulatory Settings and the long-term health reform program requested by National Cabinet.

Australian Medical Colleges

Health Ministers met with representatives of the Australian Medical Council and a number of Australian Medical Colleges to discuss current challenges with specialist recognition, specialist numbers and accreditation for training sites, as well as the requirement for the AMC and Colleges to collaborate with all jurisdictions to improve these processes. Health Ministers acknowledge the critical role the Colleges have in improving workforce capability but have noted that the Colleges could be better aligned with workforce reform priorities to ensure patients can access the care they need and want, in a safe environment. Health Ministers will continue to progress work with the Colleges to better align priorities to address pressures on the health system.

Several other items were considered by Health Ministers, including an update on development of the 9th National HIV Strategy, with Health Ministers recommitting to eliminate HIV in Australia. The Hon Anika Wells MP, Minister for Aged Care, also briefed Health Ministers on improved dementia training for first responders, and Health Ministers agreed an approach to better coordinate training between the Commonwealth and states and territories. Health Ministers also agreed to consider future arrangements for influenza vaccination programs and campaigns in the latter part of 2023.