



# **Health Ministers Meeting (HMM):**

## ***Communique***

### ***6 December 2024 – Hobart***

**Health Ministers met in Hobart today to discuss several health system reform priorities including the National Health Reform Agreement negotiations, health workforce reform, First Nations Health Care in Prisons, aged care, urgent care, and the current mpox outbreak.**

#### **National Health Reform Agreement**

Health Ministers continued negotiating for the National Health Reform Agreement, with a focus on implementation of the Mid-term Review recommendations to deliver a high performing and better integrated public health system. Health Ministers also discussed the draft First Nations Schedule to the 2025-2030 NHRA Addendum.

#### **Health workforce - Scope of Practice Review**

Health Ministers were updated by Professor Mark Cormack on the 'Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce' Scope of Practice Review. The review found that almost all health professions in the primary care sector face some barriers to working to their full scope of practice. This includes GPs, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, paramedics, allied health practitioners, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners and workers. The review recommends better supporting health teams to work together to make it easier for Australians to get high quality care. Health Ministers thanked Professor Cormack for his engagement and agreed to work collaboratively to respond to the review's recommendations.

#### **Designated registered nurse prescriber**

Health Ministers endorsed a scheduled medicines and associated registration standard for the designation Registered Nurse Prescriber role. This means that appropriately qualified Registered Nurses will be able to prescribe approved medicines when supervised by an authorised health practitioner, improving access to essential care and supporting nurses to work to a broader scope of practice.

#### **Expedited pathways for Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs)**

This year, Health Ministers supported the implementation of expedited pathways for priority Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs) to address immediate health workforce shortages in Australia. Martin Fletcher, CEO Ahpra, updated Health Ministers on the implementation of the expedited pathways for SIMGs with accepted qualifications. The new pathway commenced for general practice on 21 October 2024 and will be available for eligible applicants in anaesthesia and psychiatry by the end of December 2024, with obstetrics and gynaecology by the end of February 2025. Health Ministers noted that jurisdictions have

identified general medicine, general paediatrics, and diagnostic radiology as the next priority specialties for an expedited specialist registration pathway.

### **Registration fees for healthcare workers on parental leave**

Health Ministers previously requested Ahpra to consider a response to concerns that the current health practitioner fee structure is unfair for health practitioners who take periods of parental leave. This arrangement potentially leads to financial inequities amongst registered health practitioners. Health Ministers welcomed Ahpra's plans to implement a 30% rebate on registration fees for practitioners taking parental leave.

### **First Nations Health Care in Prisons**

Health Ministers discussed the findings and recommendations of the independent National Review of First Nations Health Care in Prisons (Review). Health Ministers committed to ensuring health care that is delivered in custodial settings addresses the needs of First Nations people and upholds the dignity and the fundamental human rights of people in places of detention. Ministers will partner with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector, Aboriginal Justice advocates in each jurisdiction, and Ministers responsible for corrections and youth justice to develop an implementation strategy. Health Ministers agreed to publish the Review and a joint Health Ministers response to the Review ([available here](#)).

### **Simplifying access to urgent care**

Health Ministers agreed to further explore the development of a simple national phone line and digital pathways to improve access to urgent care. Urgent care services help people to receive the right care when they need it, away from the Emergency Department. This will build on existing investments of all governments to improve access to health care and relieve pressure on emergency departments across Australia.

### **Expansion of Australia's Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programs**

Ministers agreed to add x-linked adrenoleukodystrophy (X-ALD) to Australia's screening programs for male newborns and commissioned further work in relation to screening female newborns. X-ALD has never been screened before in Australia's NBS programs. States and territories will now take steps to ready their programs for implementation.

### **Support at Home Program Implementation**

The Australian Government is investing more than \$4.3 billion into a new, more sustainable, in-home aged care program, Support at Home, from 1 July 2025. Ministers discussed the design of the program and how it will reduce hospital admissions and support more timely discharge of older people from hospital. All Health Ministers are committed to improving the care and experience of older Australians in the setting that is most appropriate for them.

## **Co-ordinated national response to mpox**

Health Ministers discussed the current outbreak of mpox across Australia. More than 1,300 cases of mpox have been reported in Australia in 2024. Most cases of mpox in Australia are being acquired locally, underscoring the need for a coordinated national response. Health Ministers have requested that the Australian Health Protection Committee provide urgent advice, in consultation with the Therapeutic Goods Administration, on expanding the national response to mpox including testing, vaccination and non-stigmatising and inclusive public communications. Health Ministers affirmed the need to work closely with the LGBTQI+ community in any response.