

More investment needed to improve patient health outcomes

General practice is Australia's most accessed form of healthcare, with nearly 90% of all Australians visiting their GP each year. Despite this, funding for general practice represents only 7.4% of total government health expenditure including federal, state and local government expenditure.

Today's announcements are a step in the right direction towards providing improved services to patients over 70. However, much more must be done to provide real access to primary healthcare to all Australians.

The Medicare freeze has had a profound effect on patients' access to GP services. As the cost of providing this service has increased, the cost to see a GP continues to grow.

Patients should be able to access their GP when they need to, not when they can afford to.

GPs are doing everything they can to keep general practice accessible, but patients rely on governments to appropriately fund Medicare.

Flexible models of care for older Australians

The announcement today will provide patients aged over 70 years better access to general practice through flexible models of care.

GPs will now be able to invest more time into building an ongoing relationship as the primary healthcare provider. The evidence is clear: health outcomes are improved when there is a strong and constant relationship between patients and GPs.

The new system acknowledges the central role general practice plays in our healthcare system, where patient–GP relationships are essential in ensuring that tailored and holistic care is provided.

Payments will allow practices to undertake a number of activities in ways that best suit patients' needs including telehealth consultations, phone calls to follow-up with a specialist, and checking in with a family member or carer. None of these services are currently supported under the current Medicare Benefits Scheme.

I was pleased to hear over 70's access was step one and look forward to working with government on a full roll out in coming years to deliver a health system patients want.

Rural generalism

We welcome the Government allocating funds to fast-track a Rural Generalist Pathway for trainee doctors. This will play a key role in ensuring Australians living in rural and regional communities have access to a highly trained GP who understands their individual needs and circumstances.

The specific investment in training for rural generalist GPs will ensure GPs and registrars have the right skills to practice in rural settings, and can address the shifting needs of rural and remote communities, including the ever-evolving needs of mental health and palliative care.

Funding for general practice

In the coming Federal Election, the RACGP will be standing up for patients and practitioners, and will call on all sides of politics to properly invest in primary care.

We must see a change in healthcare priorities if we want to see Australians continue to be healthy and active participants in society.

When it comes to healthcare, providing services through primary healthcare – your GP clinic – is much more efficient than providing the same service at a hospital. Proper funding for primary healthcare will not only ensure Australians have the best possible care, but also save the taxpayers and the Federal Government money.

~ENDS~

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