

Communique – AMA, Colleges, Associations and Societies meeting

More than 100 leaders from the Australian Medical Association, medical colleges, and professional societies gathered in Canberra on 18 March 2024 to discuss key issues facing the healthcare sector.

Leaders had the opportunity to hear from and ask questions of the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler; Professor Mark Cormack who is leading the government's Scope of Practice Review; and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Aged Care Mr Blair Comley.

Scope of Practice Review

While the government's Scope of Practice Review is focused on primary care, its recommendations will impact all parts of the health system, including the acute care system.

We recognise it is desirable for all health professionals to work in a health system that enables them to work at the top of scope of their scope of practice.

However, maintaining the quality and safety of care for patients should be the overriding principle driving the review.

The review must be focused on enhancing medically-led, team-based care with strong clinical governance arrangements to avoid fragmenting care and duplicating services.

Workforce

Australia has a world-leading health workforce, but we are experiencing workforce shortages across the health system, extending beyond the medical workforce to nursing and the allied health disciplines.

The absence of workforce data and planning in Australia means the development of health workforce policy happens in a vacuum. We are concerned many of the policy experiments being pursued by governments will not address the fundamental problems causing our workforce issues and will instead result in lower standards of care.

Australia requires a national medical workforce planning and advisory body to guide future workforce policy development at both national and state/territory level. This is especially critical for medical colleges, which need data to inform their training programs, including the number and distribution of specialty program training places.

This body will need to adopt a collaborative approach to workforce planning, working with the states and territories, colleges, associations, and the community.

Acknowledging the significant efforts of the public sector in supporting the delivery of medical training, the scope of the private sector to play a larger role in building the medical workforce was discussed with recognition that this would be dependent on a sustainable private sector. This is particularly important in general practice that has suffered more than most specialties from budget cuts over many years.

Private health

Our hybrid healthcare system strikes the right balance between public and private healthcare delivery. Each sector complements the other.

There is strong support for reform of private health insurance (PHI) arrangements to ensure the sector is sustainable, delivers value for members, and protects clinical autonomy and patient choice.

Stronger protections against managed care are needed while opportunities exist to improve current PHI arrangements. For example, through cover redesign, the development of a regulatory system that supports innovation in a strong clinical governance framework, fit-for-purpose funding models, and greater transparency.

Public hospitals

Public hospitals are a cornerstone of the health system, providing access to high quality care for patients – very efficiently. However, they are under immense pressure and struggling to meet community demand. The pressures on public hospitals are leading to workforce burnout.

While additional Australian Government funding for public hospitals is welcome, the need for ‘system wide’ consideration of how we might ease pressure on public hospitals was emphasised. Improved access to GP-led primary care is a critical area for continued government focus along with the need for improved communication between hospitals and general practice to help keep patients out of hospital.

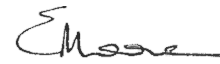
In the longer term, more reform and funding for public hospitals will be essential to their long-term sustainability. Governments must work with the profession to develop policy solutions that will ensure patients can access the care they need in a clinically appropriate timeframe.



Prof Stephen Robson
President
Australian Medical Association

Jennifer Green

Dr Jennifer Green
Secretary
Australian Hand Surgery Society



Dr Elizabeth Moore
President
Royal Australian and
New Zealand College of
Psychiatrists



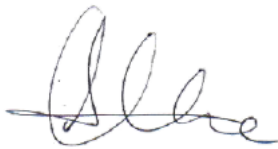
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