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BEACH REPORTS SHOW GPs WORKING HARDER AND PROVIDING VALUE AS CORNERSTONE OF AUSTRALIAN HEALTH SYSTEM

Two reports released today show that GPs are working harder than ever, and confirming their standing as the cornerstone of cost-effective quality primary health care, as the Australian population ages and chronic disease becomes more prevalent.

General Practice Activity in Australia 2015–16 and *A decade of general practice activity 2006–07 to 2015–16*, the final reports to be published by the University of Sydney’s Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) program, highlight the pressures on general practice.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said these reports show that GPs are working harder, and are delivering millions more services - including treatments, prescriptions, referrals, and tests - than they did a decade ago.

“In 2015-16, Australian GPs managed 154 problems per 100 patient encounters, significantly more than in 2006-07 (149 per 100 patient encounters),” Dr Gannon said.

“The reports also reveal that GPs managed 67 million extra problems at patient encounters in 2015-16 than they did in 2006-07.”

Compared to 2006-07, GPs provided:

- 31 million more prescriptions;
- 25 million more clinical treatments (eg advice and counselling);
- 10 million more procedures;
- 5 million more referrals to medical specialists;
- 5 million more to allied health services;
- 24 million more pathology tests/test battery orders; and
- 6 million more imaging tests.

“Australia's health system is built around the central role of general practice,” Dr Gannon said.

“Data from earlier BEACH work shows that if GP services were performed in other areas of the health system, they would cost considerably more.

“For example, GP services provided in a hospital emergency department would cost between \$396 and \$599 each, compared to the average cost of a GP visit of around \$50.

“General practice is keeping the nation healthy and is good value for money, with Medicare spending on GP services only representing about 6 per cent of total Government health expenditure.

“Despite widespread acknowledgement that general practice needs to be strengthened if we are to ensure the ongoing sustainability of our health system, GPs are caught in a funding squeeze.

“The continuing freeze on Medicare rebates and other funding cuts are poor policy that fails to recognise the value that general practice is delivering to our health system.

“While the AMA shares the vision for the Government's Health Care Home model, the Government has committed no new funding and simply expects GPs to deliver enhanced services for patients with no extra support.

“The recent election highlighted the value Australians place on their GPs. It is now time for the Government to give GPs the support they need to deliver the care the community deserves.”

Today's reports are the last to be published by BEACH, following the Government's decision earlier this year to withdraw funding for the almost 20-year-old program.

“I would like to pay tribute to BEACH and its researchers, who have made an invaluable contribution to informing policy around General Practice for the past two decades,” Dr Gannon said.

“The decision to cut BEACH funding was short-sighted and extremely disappointing.

“The important work of these researchers will be greatly missed.”

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