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SET FUNDING TARGETS FOR GP SERVICES, RESEARCH – AMA
AMA Position Statement on General Practice in Primary Health Care

The AMA has called on the Government to set a target for funding GP services, to deliver extra funding for general practice research, and to set up a centre of excellence in general practice and primary care research.

AMA Vice President, Dr Tony Bartone, today released the *AMA Position Statement on General Practice in Primary Health Care*, which outlines the key elements and central role of general practice in the delivery of quality primary health care services in Australia.

“General practice is the cornerstone of a successful primary health care system, and must be funded adequately,” Dr Bartone said.

“GPs are the first point of medical contact for most Australians, and a visit to the GP can head off more serious health problems down the track.

“Evidence shows that populations in countries with strong general practice have lower rates of ill-health and mortality, better access to care, lower rates of hospital readmissions, and less use of emergency services.

“GPs are becoming increasingly important as the population ages, and there is an increase in the burden of chronic disease requiring long-term care.

“GPs are managing more problems and spending more time with patients in each consultation than they did a decade ago as patients, particularly those who are older or have chronic diseases, present with multiple reasons for their visit.

“Yet funding for general practice is not growing to match rising demand. The Medicare rebate freeze is putting pressure on practices that bulk bill, and is set to stay in place until 2020.

“This combination of rising demand and shrinking funding will inevitably lead to a decline in the ability of general practice to provide quality health care, unless the Government delivers real resources to frontline GP services.

“Commonwealth Government funding for GP services currently stands at about 8 per cent of the total Government health budget – a modest investment that is delivering excellent outcomes for patients.

“The AMA is proposing that this figure should be lifted over time to a target of around 10 per cent, as part of an effort to re-orientate the health system to focus more on general practice and primary health care, with long-term savings to the health budget anticipated in return.

“The AMA is also calling for a dedicated stream of funding for general practice research.

“General practice is a distinct medical specialty and requires its own specific research. Research improves patient care, is important for teachers of general practice, and stimulates intellectual rigour and critical thinking.

“It is the missing link in the development of high quality, evidence-based health care for populations.

“About 2 per cent of National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants are directed to supporting primary health care research, including general practice.

“This is woefully inadequate, and is well below the contribution of general practice and primary care to the broader health system.

“The AMA believes that general practice and primary care deserve a much fairer distribution of NHMRC funding.

“We are calling for a dedicated stream of general practice research funding in the order of 8 per cent of its grants budget.

“This funding must be backed by the establishment of a national centre of excellence in general practice and primary care research.”

The AMA *Position Statement on General Practice in Primary Health Care* is available at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/general-practice-primary-health-care-2016>.

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