

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
Website: <http://www.ama.com.au/>



Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon, ABC Radio World Today, 22 February 2017

Subjects: Medicare freeze; Medicinal cannabis

EMILY BOURKE: The Federal Government looks set to make changes to its freeze on the Medicare rebate for GPs, as it continues to prepare for this year's Budget. The freeze was first put in place by Labor but has been continued by the Coalition, and it was a key area of dispute in last year's federal election.

The Australian Medical Association says it's genuinely hopeful that the Government understands the need to increase investment in the health system. While the Government works on the Budget, it's taken another decision: to give Australian patients faster access to medicinal cannabis. From Canberra, Naomi Woodley reports.

REPORTER: The Federal Government knows it lost votes in general practice waiting rooms over its decision to continue a freeze on the Medicare rebate paid to GPs through until 2020. The Health Minister, Greg Hunt, has again indicated the policy is under the spotlight as the Government prepares this year's Budget.

[Comments from Greg Hunt]

REPORTER: The Australian Medical Association has long advocated against the freeze. Its President, Dr Michael Gannon, says he's in no doubt that, as a relatively new Health Minister, Greg Hunt understands their position.

MICHAEL GANNON: He's a very capable man who understands the complex issues in the Health portfolio. We are determined to see him help turn his Government's record on health policy around. At the top of the agenda is adequate public hospital funding and unravelling the Medicare freeze. He knows by now our very clear view that health spending represents an investment in our community. It need not be always seen as a cost.

REPORTER: He said again this morning, though, that on the Medicare rebate freeze, yes, the Government is willing to review it if there are other reforms that can be found and presumably other savings within the Health budget. Are you putting forward alternatives?

MICHAEL GANNON: I'm very sensitive to the desires of Minister Hunt, the Prime Minister, and the rest of the Cabinet to try and bring our Budget closer to balance, and to maintain the nation's triple A credit rating. That's responsible government.

But I am genuinely hopeful that they will see the value in investing further in our health system. They need to be clever in finding ways for the new spending, but we will always advocate responsibly on behalf of not only the patients of Australia, but those taxpayers that do the heavy lifting.

[Comments from Greg Hunt]

REPORTER: The Government had already decided to allow the cultivation and production of medicinal cannabis in Australia, but setting that up is taking some time. Dr Gannon from the AMA has reacted cautiously to the announcement.

MICHAEL GANNON: Look, I suppose it's good news, but I'm not going to greet this with the level of enthusiasm that many others will. It's so important that we stick to the scientific evidence about exactly where cannabis may and may not be useful. It is a long way from being a panacea for the whole range of conditions it's claimed to be useful for, but in those circumstances where a doctor makes a judgment that it should be prescribed, it's entirely appropriate that patients or their families can access a legal supply, rather than resorting to the black market.

REPORTER: He says it's up to individual doctors to decide if medicinal cannabis is appropriate for their patients.

MICHAEL GANNON: We've heard claims about its use in the palliative care setting, and there's some reasonably good evidence. We've heard some evidence about the use of medicinal cannabis in different conditions of spasticity. It may be useful, but the degree of enthusiasm for cannabis sometimes is a long way ahead of the scientific evidence.

REPORTER: And he says it's far from the biggest decision Greg Hunt will have to take in the Health portfolio.

EMILY BOURKE: Naomi Woodley reporting.

22 February 2017

CONTACT: John Flannery
Maria Hawthorne

02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: http://twitter.com/ama_media

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>