



# **Family Doctors in their communities**

**The AMA's national patient survey results**



## What patients said

*“The reason there isn’t enough GPs is because the population has boomed and government hasn’t kept the training of doctors in balance with the demand for their services.”*

# What do patients really think about health professionals?

Last year the AMA commissioned Essential Research to do some research into public attitudes toward primary healthcare services.

The aim was to reveal public attitudes relating to the Federal Government's push to decrease the role of General Practitioners and increase the role of independent health practitioners. The AMA also wanted to get a snapshot of public perceptions of GPs and the system in which they work.

The overwhelming message is that GPs are considered by the public to be the most trustworthy, knowledgeable and experienced health professionals. Nurses, hospital doctors and locums fare well in the public eye. Alternative therapists have considerably less popular respect but GPs top the three key categories of the survey.

The survey also showed that the majority of Australians want to see more nurses but they want them working with doctors, not as a replacement for them. 82 per cent of those surveyed agree that the best outcome for patients is to have doctors and nurses work together. 76 per cent want a model that sees Government funding more nurses to work with GPs in general practice.

It's clear that GPs occupy a special place as respected professionals and trusted members of the community. This research should send a strong message to politicians who are considering shifting the role of GPs in primary healthcare.



# Knowledge, experience and trust

*Patients consider their family doctors to be the most knowledgeable, experienced and trustworthy professionals in the health sector.*

**Which of these health professionals do patients consider to be 'extremely knowledgeable'?**

Family doctors	72%
Doctors	66%
General Practitioners	65%
Doctors in emergency at hospital	56%
Locums (Doctors on call)	42%
Nurses	42%
Alternative therapists	15%

**Which of these health professionals do patients consider to be 'extremely experienced'?**

Family doctors	71%
Doctors	66%
General Practitioners	66%
Doctors in emergency at hospital	57%
Nurses	51%
Locums (Doctors on call)	44%
Alternative therapists	19%

**Which of these health professionals do patients consider to be 'extremely trustworthy'?**

Family doctors	76%
General Practitioners	64%
Doctors	64%
Nurses	57%
Doctors in emergency at hospital	56%
Locums (Doctor on call)	44%
Alternative therapists	19%

78 per cent of patients agree that GPs and family doctors are the fundamental pillar of good health in our society. Other health professionals have important roles but cannot replace the GP.

# Access to doctors

*The tradition of the local GP remains a cornerstone of the contemporary Australian community.*

Despite the changing nature of our society, 88 per cent of patients still have a regular GP or family doctor. Furthermore, 78 per cent of patients see their doctor at least two or three times a year, and seeing your local GP is considered very easy or reasonably easy by 77 per cent of patients.

## Do patients have a regular family doctor for their health needs?

Yes	88%
No	12%

## Where do patients go if they if they don't have a regular family doctor?

Attend a local clinic and see any available Doctor	57%
Go wherever you can to get an appointment	24%
Go to the chemist	13%
Attend the local emergency department at hospital	6%

## How often do patients visit a doctor?

Less than once a year	7%
About once a year	16%
2 or 3 times a year	40%
Every couple of months	29%
More often	9%

## Do patients find it easy or difficult to get in to see a doctor?

Very Easy – I can get in to see my GP when I need to	19%
Reasonably easy – I can get an appointment but I may need to wait	58%
OK – I can see a GP but not always the one I want	15%
Difficult – I find it hard to access a GP	6%
Very Difficult – I can never access a GP	2%

86 per cent of patients think it's important to have a usual Family Doctor that they know and trust.

# Going to the doctor

*With our increasingly time-constrained lifestyles, people are using their family doctors differently. Nevertheless, over 60 per cent of patients surveyed said their last visit to see a doctor was about one particular health issue.*

## What happens at a typical GP consultation?

Discuss one particular health issue	62%
Discuss a range of different health issues	30%
Discuss a matter relating to a family member	8%
Discuss general issues relating to stress or depression	6%
Other	6%
Nurses	42%
Alternative therapists	15%

There are a number of things which patients consider to be important in their relationship with health professionals. The most important of these, however, is getting enough time with a doctor to discuss their health needs. Being able to get an appointment at a suitable time is also very important, along with having a long-term relationship with a single doctor, who knows the patients health history.

## What do patients consider to be important to them in regard to their usual medical practice?

Getting enough time with the doctor	96%
Being able to get an appointment at a time that suits the patient	95%
Having a long term relationship with one doctor so they can know the patient's medical history	94%
Having two or three doctors that the patient likes and trusts	76%
Having a nurse at the practice to support the doctors	71%
Just being able to turn up without an appointment	59%
Having a female doctor available	54%

## **What patients said**

*"Most GPs are very hard working and ethical people. I wouldn't like to see the quality of healthcare that we have grown accustomed to in this country go down the drain."*

*"Building a relationship with one doctor who knows and understands your overall health situation is the most efficient way of dealing with patients they do not have to take a health history each time you call."*

## **What patients said**

*"I have had good doctors and bad doctors and the ones that seem to do better listen to the patients' needs and history. My GP is great, very trustworthy. We even have her phone number for any need we have."*

*"The government needs to do a lot more for our health system and a lot more for our GPs and future GPs."*



# Patient satisfaction

*The overwhelming majority of patients are normally satisfied with their GP after a consultation.*

Satisfaction levels were highest among patients aged 55 and over, while people in the city were more likely to be satisfied than people in regional or rural areas. Satisfaction was higher among patients that have a regular family doctor than those who don't.

## How satisfied are patients after a normal consultation with a Doctor?

Very satisfied	39%
Satisfied	44%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13%
Dissatisfied	3%
Very dissatisfied	1%
Total satisfied	83%
Total dissatisfied	4%

# Paying for Services

Half of patients surveyed said they were usually bulk billed through Medicare, while a quarter of patients were bulk billed for some services only, and 15 per cent said their doctor doesn't bulk bill them at all. Of those patients who aren't always bulk billed, over half said they were happy to pay extra for a doctor they knew and trusted or for higher quality care.

## How do people usually pay for their GP services?

Bulk billed through Medicare – I don't pay the bill at the counter	50%
Bulk billed – I use my health care card	7%
Bulk billed because of special circumstances	2%
Mixed billing – I pay for some and other services are bulk billed	25%
I pay, but my doctor bulk bills my children	2%
My doctor doesn't bulk bill me at all	15%

## Why do people pay for the 'gap'?

Because I don't mind paying to see a doctor I know and trust	48%
Because it is impossible to find a doctor who bulk bills	32%
Because its more convenient	13%
I don't mind paying because the medical care is of high quality	7%

71 per cent of patients said they get good value from time spent with their GP.

# The roles of health professionals

*Overwhelmingly, patients believe that GPs should remain at the heart of the primary health care.*

Patients have strong views about the roles of health professionals in the primary health care system. In short, patients want to see more doctors and nurses in their communities, but they want them to work together. There is little support for building a second-tier health system. Patients generally believe nurse practitioners can play a greater role within the existing system but with oversight from trained GPs.

## What do patients think about nurse practitioners?

The best outcome for patients is having doctors and nurses work together	82% agree
Nurses are not trained to diagnose the full range of illnesses and diseases	80% agree
Nurses should be used more in doctors' practices, but with oversight by doctors	71% agree
Nurses have more compassion than doctors and are better at dealing with patients	34% agree
Nurses are fully trained professionals and should be allowed to practice without regard to doctors	20% agree

## What sort of primary healthcare system do patients want in the future?

The General Practitioner remains as the primary point of care for all health issues	80% agree
The Government funds more nurses to work with GPs in general practices	72% agree
The Government changes the system to allow nurses to substitute for GP's	23% agree

69 per cent of patients think there aren't enough doctors and it's time the government invested in more GPs.

## **What patients said**

*“Use of one family practitioner is a sensible approach to preventing health problems as they also understand the whole family dynamic.”*

*“it is important to establish a long-term relationship with a GP or family doctor as they get to know you as an individual and have an understanding of your needs.”*



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