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AMA

AIHW REPORT DEMONSTRATES NEED FOR GREATER SUPPORT FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today that the latest general practice activity report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) not only reinforces the leading role of GPs in primary care, but shows that GPs are becoming increasingly more important as the population has a higher incidence of chronic disease that needs to be managed in the community.

Dr Pesce said the clear message from the report is that GPs are in higher demand and they need greater support to help them to continue providing the high quality holistic care that patients need.

"When people require prevention advice or chronic disease management, or when they are sick or injured, they want to see their GP," Dr Pesce said.

"With an ageing population and more people with complex and chronic disease, the demand for GPs is growing.

"This is not a time for GPs to be substituted or for their role to be watered down. Now is the time to recognise and appreciate the key role of GPs and provide them with more support."

The AMA is calling for practical action to assist GPs, including:

- reviewing and simplifying Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) GP items to enable patients to receive rebates appropriate to, and reflective of, the high quality acute care, complex care, chronic disease management and preventive care provided in general practice (as confirmed by the AIHW report);
- providing greater support for practice nurses who play a critical role in general practice in Australia – such as improved MBS arrangements to support a broader range of work to be undertaken by GP practice nurses and expanding practice nurse grants to all geographic locations in Australia;
- providing GP infrastructure grants to build on the existing valuable network of general practice throughout Australia – to fund space for teaching/training and to allow practices to provide comprehensive multidisciplinary care on-site in the practice;
- providing continued growth in GP training positions – the Government has funded extra training places but more are needed; and
- ensuring that other health professionals work collaboratively with GPs, not independently, to promote continuity of holistic care for patients.

The AIHW report says that GPs are generally the first port of call in the Australian health system, with an average five visits per person in 2008-09, and that in 2008-09 chronic conditions made up 36 per cent of all problems managed, the most common being hypertension, depression, and diabetes.

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