

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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## GOVERNMENT RESPONDING TO AMA AND COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT PRIMARY CARE REFORMS

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today that the AMA welcomes recent comments from Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, that indicate the Government is moving toward a primary care reform agenda more consistent with AMA policy and more in line with community expectations.

In a speech to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Minister said:

*“...improving patient outcomes is our number one priority. Improving outcomes will need **continuity of care, and more integrated care.** We understand many of you and your GP colleagues are nervous about **the potential to further fracture care to patients.** I can expressly assure you we are alive to this risk and do not intend to implement these changes in a manner that allows that...”*

Dr Pesce said the Minister’s language suggests the Government has detected the mood of the community and the mood of Australia’s general practitioners who are concerned about the fragmentation of primary care hinted at by many of the recommendations to Government by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) and other bodies.

“To most Australians, general practice *is* primary care,” Dr Pesce said.

“When people get sick or injured or require care for a chronic ailment, they want to see a GP.

“People trust their GPs and know they will get the highest quality care every time.

“So any policy that seeks to reform primary care must preserve the role of the GP as the leader and coordinator of primary care.

“There is no substitute for a GP.

“The AMA supports a coordinated care model based around GP-led multidisciplinary primary care teams.

“We are pleased that the Minister has clearly articulated that the Government recognises the centrality of general practice in providing primary care services to the Australian community.

“We now call on the Minister to state clearly that the Government’s primary care reforms, especially those regarding nurse practitioners and midwives, are genuinely about collaborative care with doctors, and not about primary care being provided independent of doctors.

“Such an assurance would be met with relief by the Australian community,” Dr Pesce said.

The AMA recently released its *Priority Investment Plan for Australia’s Health System*. A key element of the Plan is the AMA’s practical policy prescription to ensure that general practice is equipped to lead primary care in Australia into the future.

**The AMA plan requires:**

- General practice infrastructure grants totalling \$830 million over three years in order to kick-start the facilities required to teach and train and provide comprehensive multidisciplinary care through general practice;
- 820 prevocational general practice training placements a year by 2012;
- 1500 first year GP vocational training positions a year by 2015;
- Immediate doubling of existing teaching grants to fund increased opportunities for medical students and other health care providers to access multidisciplinary clinical training in general practice;
- Improved MBS arrangements to support a broader range of work to be undertaken by GP practice nurses and allied health workers for and on behalf of GPs;
- 1300 more GP practice nurse/allied health worker grants by 2011-12;
- Review and simplification of 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;
- Implementation of GP referred MRI and point of care testing based on best practice clinical guidelines; and
- \$67 million a year to provide medical services in Residential Aged Care Facilities, as per the NHHRC recommendation.

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