

TUESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2009

ACTION NEEDED FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

The draft National Primary Health Care Strategy, released yesterday, provides a clear direction for the future frontline health system and now's the time for action, says the Director of The Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) based at The Australian National University.

APHCRI Director Robert Wells said this document confirms the key recommendations in the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission report and is likely to be reinforced by the preventative health taskforce review, which is about to be released.

"Primary health care is the frontline of the health system - it needs to be strong so that it can protect and promote the health of communities and provide care to Australians."

Key directions for reforming primary health care are in the Commonwealth Government's domain.

The draft primary health care plan makes recommendations about more flexible funding models, new governance arrangements and a workforce shakeup to provide more comprehensive services.

"New funding models will enhance an already strong Medicare system, rather than replace it as has been suggested in today's media," Mr Wells said. "Medicare has had blended payments for general practices for well over a decade, so this is nothing new."

Mr Wells added that there needs to be more flexibility in meeting both episodic care and a greater capacity to address the needs of those with chronic and complex conditions.

He supported the four major focuses of the draft strategy: providing better access; improved chronic care; more emphasis on prevention; and better quality, safety, performance and accountability.

Evidence from APHCRI's research shows how the Australian primary health care system could be more effective, efficient and built on multi-disciplinary teamwork where nurses and allied health professionals have a much stronger role in treatment and prevention.

In its submission to the Toward a National Primary Health Care Strategy discussion paper, APHCRI recommended that regional primary health care organisations need to be developed to foster primary health care research and deliver services that meet the needs of different communities.

Mr Robert Wells is available for interview until 2.30pm today.

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