



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Dear Division and SBO CEOs,

As you are all aware, an expansion to the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative was recently announced as part of the May 2007 Budget, *Aged care – improved health services for residents of aged care homes*.

Please find below some details that should address any initial questions that you may have about the expansion of the Panels Initiative.

What does the new measure do?

- The expansion to the Panels Initiative will essentially enable allied health service providers to be remunerated for participating in Panels.
- It is expected to improve access to GPs as well as primary care options for residents of aged care homes.
- The expansion of the Panels Initiative will support both GPs and aged care homes in accessing primary care options and multi-disciplinary health care services.
- The expansion will also enable allied health professionals to work with GPs and aged care homes on quality improvement strategies for the care of residents.

What is the impact per person/organisation?

- There will be no change to funding received by GPs or aged care homes under the expanded Panels Initiative.
- Divisions of General Practice and SBOs will receive additional funding to support the engagement and participation of allied health professionals under the expanded Panels Initiative.
- Additional funding (equivalent to the amount already available to fund GPs) will be available to remunerate allied health professionals involved in the Panels Initiative.

How will the expanded Aged Care GP Panels Initiative work?

Management and administration of the expanded Panels Initiative will be based directly on the current “Aged Care GP Panels Initiative Handbook – November 2006”.

The aims of the program will be amended slightly to reflect the incorporation of allied health service providers in to the Panels Initiative but will generally aim to:

1. Improve access to appropriate medical and primary care for all aged care residents;
2. Increase participation of GPs and allied health service providers in aged care Initiatives aimed at improving quality of care;
3. To ensure GPs, allied health service providers and Divisions are working more effectively with aged care homes.

Participants will remain the same with the obvious addition of allied health service providers who are defined at Attachment A.

Funding Splits

Funding for the *Aged care – improved health services for residents of aged care homes* measure is \$92.9 million over four years and is divided as follows:

Health and Ageing:	Aged Care GP Panels	\$48.9 million
	Increased MBS rebates	\$37.0 million
DVA:	Increase DVA payments	\$ 6.9 million

Divisions and SBOs should be aware that the Department will be taking this opportunity to update the funding formula for Panels including:

- Updating aged care homes and bed data; and
- Increasing funding for SBOs so that they are properly remunerated for their role.

Timeframes

- Contract Variation by late May 2007
- Divisions network supplied with updated Panels Initiative Guidelines end June 2007
- Departments website to be updated by 1 July 2007
- Expansion of the Aged Care GP Panels begins on 1 July 2007
- Program expected to be officially launched 1 August 2007. Program launch will be supported by print media advertisements.
- National workshop(s) expected to be held in September to facilitate optimum uptake of the Initiative by all stakeholders.

Changes to MBS

- Divisions should recognise that the *Aged Care - improved health services for residents of aged care homes* budget measure provided additional funds for MBS items that support the Panels Initiative.
- The Panels Initiative is supported by the MBS especially as Panels does not pay for clinical services.
- By increasing the “call out” component of Medicare rebates for GP services provided in aged care homes, from 1 November 2007, aged care residents will receive an additional rebate of up to \$18 each time they see a GP in their aged care home.

- The Medicare rebate will also increase by \$17.55 where GPs contribute to the preparation of a care plan for aged care residents and for people in the community with chronic conditions and complex care needs.

Program Review

- Divisions should note that a review of the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative will be conducted from May to September 2007.
- The purpose of this review is to determine if the current program is adequately achieving its objectives. The review will assess the effectiveness, appropriateness and efficiency of the Initiative.

Aged Care Homes Survey & relevant Performance Indicators

- Divisions should also note that it is not expected that an Aged Care Homes Survey will be undertaken in 2007. The survey will be held over until the outcome of the program review is finalised in September 2007. Performance indicators will be amended in the upcoming contract variations to reflect the absence of the Survey.
- Based on the results on the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative review being conducted this year, an evaluation framework will be developed. An evaluation is expected to be conducted using this framework in 2010-11.
- A consultant will be engaged to undertake a survey of aged care homes on a biannual basis from 2007-08 and undertake a survey of GPs/allied health service providers on a biannual basis from 2008-09 (on alternative years) in order to assess the progress of the initiative.

Yours Sincerely,

[authorised for electronic transmission]

Jennie Roe
Assistant Secretary
GP Divisions and Information Branch
23 May 2007

Attachment A

What is an Allied Health Service Provider as defined by the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative?

For the purpose of the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative, an allied health service may include a service provided by:

- Aboriginal Health Workers
- Aboriginal Mental Health Workers
- Audiologists
- Chiropodists
- Chiropractors
- Counsellors
- Diabetes Educators
- Dieticians/nutritionists
- Dental Hygienists
- Exercise Physiologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Oral Hygienists
- Orthoptists
- Orthotists/Prosthetics
- Osteopaths
- Physiotherapists
- Podiatrists
- Psychologists
- Radiographers
- Registered Nurses, with specialist roles
- Social Workers
- Speech Pathologists

Divisions may fund other allied health professionals not listed above, subject to the Division obtaining written approval from the Department.