

Review Implementation Committee
Divisions of General Practice: Future Directions

COMMUNIQUE FOUR – MEETING OF 3 DECEMBER 2004

The Review Implementation Committee (RIC), established to provide advice to the Australian Government on implementing the government's response to the 2003 *Review of the Role of Divisions of General Practice*, held its fourth meeting on 3 December 2004.

The new National Quality and Performance System for the Divisions network was discussed, focussing on mechanisms to further the development of national performance indicators, quality standards and accreditation, supporting and rewarding strong performance and the development of the 2005-2008 funding agreements. Progress in relation to planning and reporting and encouraging better structural efficiency was also considered.

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators for the Divisions network will help to ensure that Divisions are able to demonstrate what they are achieving and to ensure accountability and transparency to the community and general practice on performance and outcomes. An information paper on the development of national performance indicators is available on the RIC information page of the department's website at:
www.health.gov.au/pcd/programs/divisions/index.htm.

The development of an initial set of performance indicators will be finalised in February 2005 in order to feed into draft contracts to be released in March 2005.

Program Indicators

The Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) has been contracted to develop the initial set of program indicators relating to health outcomes in a number of priority areas.

To undertake this work, APHCRI have established a technical working group, drawing in expertise relevant to each area. An initial set of draft objectives and performance indicators has now been developed based on areas where the network has already commenced work to help make the transition more seamless. The following priority areas are covered by these indicators:

1. Access – making care more accessible for older Australians in residential care;
2. Prevention and early intervention – immunisation;
3. Better manage chronic disease – diabetes, asthma and mental health; and
4. Supporting integration and multidisciplinary care – general practice-hospital interface.

APHCRI have now released this work-in-progress draft for comment in order to obtain feedback on the extent to which the objectives and indicators are reasonable and feasible. It is available on the RIC information page of the department's website at:
www.health.gov.au/pcd/programs/divisions/index.htm.

A large Stakeholder Reference Group has been established to play a key role in reviewing and providing feedback on these draft indicators. This group includes GPs, Divisions, State Based Organisations (SBO), Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) and consumer representatives with the expertise to review the performance measures. This group will meet on 8 December 2004 to feed in to the APHCRI process. Membership can also be found on the department's website.

The initial set of draft indicators will also be reviewed by national/international domain experts to obtain feedback on the extent to which the indicators are clinically relevant in primary health care and are supported by evidence.

The department and the ADGP will distribute the initial set of draft indicators to the Divisions network for information and for feedback to APHCRI on the reasonableness and feasibility of these indicators. Feedback provided will be used to refine the draft indicators for consideration at the 21 January 2005 RIC meeting.

Governance Indicators

Governance (or non-clinical) national performance indicators relating to organisational capacity are being developed for all members of the Divisions network.

The aim is to develop governance indicators that are concrete and achievable, that reflect appropriate engagement for the Divisions network in each area and demonstrate a commitment to best practice and accountability.

A proposed set of governance indicators have been developed through a workshop on 17-18 November 2004. The workshop was facilitated by an expert in the field with experience working with the Divisions network and the group included Division, SBO and ADGP representation, relevant people from state and central offices of the Department of Health and Ageing, APHCRI and the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHCRIS).

Draft governance indicators for Divisions cover the following key areas:

- performance improvement culture;
- effective external engagement;
- financial accountability; and
- responsible risk management.

Draft indicators for SBOs were also developed at this workshop covering the following three priority areas:

- governance;
- building capacity of Divisions to achieve expected outcomes; and
- building links with State level agencies.

Further work will be undertaken by workshop participants to finalise the Divisions governance indicators and to further develop those for SBOs for consideration at the next RIC meeting.

Quality Standards

Accreditation against a set of quality standards is one component of the new National Quality and Performance system being developed for the Divisions network.

The accreditation requirement for Divisions network members:

- will be based on a set of agreed core quality standards, covering a range of internal organisational functions;
- will initially be voluntary, although there will be a set time by which they will need to have undertaken accreditation using a recognised accreditation model;
- will not disadvantage those who have already obtained accreditation;
- will allow choice from a number of recognised accreditation models; and
- should be viewed as a way of supporting organisational capacity to deliver the business of the organisation and the outcomes of the Government response.

During October and November 2004, meetings were held with relevant accreditation bodies, Victorian Divisions with accreditation experience and General Practice Divisions Victoria to identify arrangements which best reflect the needs of the Divisions network and the department.

As a result of these consultations three accreditation models, based on the following standards, have been identified as being appropriate for Divisions network members:

- Quality Improvement Council's (QIC) Core Module of standards;
- The Australian Council of Healthcare Standards' (ACHS) EQuIP Corporate standards; and
- International Organization for Standardization's ISO9000 (specifically ISO9001:2000) standards.

An information paper on quality standards and accreditation will be made available on the RIC information page on the department's website shortly at:

www.health.gov.au/pcd/programs/divisions/index.htm.

Development of the 2005-2008 Funding Agreements

A three year Transitional Funding Agreement is now in place with Divisions and SBOs to provide certainty for the network while new arrangements can be developed. The department has committed to offer new funding agreements to the Divisions network in early 2005, with the agreements due to start on 1 July 2005.

The new funding agreements will contain a more streamlined approach to Divisions funding, with reporting, payments and other requirements standardised for different streams of funding from the Department of Health and Ageing.

In December 2004, the department will write to members of the Divisions network to request feedback on the Transitional Funding Agreement. This letter will also outline the process and timetable for developing the new funding agreements so Divisions are clear about their involvement. These submissions and comments will be collated and will inform the lessons from the current agreement.

In early March 2005, a draft funding agreement will be provided to members of the Divisions network for their initial consultation and comment. This second phase of consultation will be conducted over a period of approximately four weeks with feedback provided to the department by early April 2005.

By late May 2005, the finalised “package” of information will be forwarded to members of the Divisions network. This will allow further time for the funding agreements to be executed by both parties prior to the commencement of the funding agreement on 1 July 2005.

In addition to this consultation with the Divisions network, a Funding Agreement Working Group will be established, chaired by Ms Lisa McGlynn, Assistant Secretary, Budget and Performance Branch, Department of Health and Ageing, to consider and comment on the templates and draft funding agreements prior to consideration by the Divisions network. This will be a time-limited group that examines the detail of the agreements and provides comment on the best way to incorporate required changes.

Progress on this issue will be considered at the next RIC meeting.

Improving Network Performance

Following an initial discussion about performance development, a framework for improving performance will be developed for consideration at the next RIC meeting. This framework will include transparent mechanisms to reward strong performance and provide support to improve the performance of under-performing network members. This work is aimed at driving continuous improvement across the Divisions network.

Encouraging Better Structural Efficiency

If Divisions are to maximise the delivery of services and programs to general practice and the community it is vital that their structural arrangements support this. Members of the network may wish/need to examine their structural arrangements to ensure they are able to fulfil the roles and expectations outlined in the government response as these will be incorporated within contractual arrangements.

A working group including Division network representatives with knowledge in this area is being established, to be chaired by Mr Bill Newton, CEO of General Practice Divisions Victoria. This group will consider the impact of size, structure and boundaries on Divisions’ capability to deliver outcomes for general practice, the community and the department, and what sorts of structural or boundary changes could assist Divisions to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness. It will also consider how to support Divisions, through information and advice, to manage the implementation of changes, and how Divisions can communicate about changes to ensure that appropriate information reaches all GPs.

Progress made by this working group will be reported to the 4 March 2005 RIC meeting.

Some Divisions have already applied to the department to make changes to their structure, size and boundaries. These applications are being considered and progressed on a case by case basis and will inform the development of criteria for assessing applications for change and/or financial assistance to develop a business case.

Planning and Reporting

High standards for planning and reporting are essential for all organisations to help achieve their plans and ensure accountability for improved outcomes and transparent holding of the funds they receive.

A review of the planning and reporting framework is appropriate due to the development of a national performance framework that includes national performance indicators. Information from the national performance indicators needs to be captured along with local performance information.

The department has agreed to work in consultation with the Divisions network to develop an efficient planning and reporting system that covers all major departmental funding streams.

A working group, chaired by Ms Carmen Navarro, PHCRIS, with representatives from the Divisions network and the department, is being established to develop a national common planning and reporting framework. This group have met twice to date to progress this work. The department will write to Divisions and SBOs before the end of the year to provide information to assist the planning work that occurs early in the new year.

A consultant will be engaged to work together with the department and Division network representatives to review and build on the existing structure and content of the Annual Budget and unaudited financial reports to better meet the needs of the Divisions network and the department.

Working group progress and outcomes of the consultancy will be reported to the next RIC meeting.

A letter to all Division network members concerning the national planning and reporting framework will be developed and provided to all the Divisions network members in December 2004.

Information for the Divisions Network and Other Stakeholders

The range of changes arising from the review and government response will have a significant impact on the Divisions network. An approach for National and State level workshops in March 2005 that will clearly explain the changes to the Divisions network is being developed. The ADGP will work with SBOs to develop a proposed approach for these workshops. The ADGP and SBOs will have a key part to play in working with Divisions to ensure they are well prepared for the changes that will occur. It will be important for dates to be set to allow attendance to be planned.

Subsequent Meetings

The next meeting will be held on Friday 21 January 2005. A further meeting is planned for Friday 4 March 2005.

Further Information and Providing Feedback

Further information is available on the department's website at: www.health.gov.au/pcd/programs/divisions/index.htm. Comments and feedback on the implementation of the government response can be sent to the department at divisions.response@health.gov.au