



# **NEWS RELEASE**

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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## **Medicare Package attempts to breathe life back into General Practice**

The Government's Medicare Package is a long overdue attempt to breathe life back into general practice, according to Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP).

*ADGP is the peak body representing Australia's 121 Divisions of General Practice. 95% of GPs are members of a Division making the Divisions Network the largest GP group in Australia.*

"General practice has been significantly under-resourced for many years. For too long the system has survived on the altruism of general practitioners," Dr Walters said

"This injection of \$917 million of funding over 4 years goes some of the way to getting general practice back on its feet and enabling GPs to continue to deliver high quality care to the community. It also has some potential to deliver a long term cure for the Australian primary health care system.

"However, one hurdle to the implementation of the Package is the Government's decision to require that practices, rather than GPs, opt in to the proposed new system.

"For many GPs, particularly those in large or diverse practices, it may be difficult or almost impossible to reach an agreement with their colleagues on whether or not to opt in. This could create a major hurdle to the implementation of the Package," Dr Walters said.

Dr Walters said that the Government had responded in this Package to the call by ADGP and other GP groups for more investment in primary care.

"The Package addresses the main areas of need identified by ADGP in our Federal Budget Submission: workforce shortages; a lack of professional support for GPs; and increasing financial pressures on practices," Dr Walters said.

"For those practices that opt in, the Package attempts to streamline the current system of patient rebates to allow patients to pay just the "gap" payment at the point of service. This would be welcomed by both GPs and patients.

"The funding for GPs to employ a practice nurse or other allied health professional to work with them in a general practice team will also be welcomed by the community. To ensure that all

communities can benefit from the increased access to primary care provided by practice teams, ADGP will be advocating for this funding to be as widely available as possible,” Dr Walters said.

Dr Walters welcomed the aspects of the Package targeting those in the community most in need of assistance, such as people on low incomes and people who are high level users of the health system.

“The creation of a safety-net to cover GP and specialist fees for concession card holders will benefit people with serious and chronic illnesses who need regular and intense medical care.

“However, I am disappointed that the package does not address the issue of medical specialist charges to concession card holders. The fees charged by other medical specialists are typically much higher than those charged by GPs and this Package will do nothing to contain these costs.

“For GPs, this package presents an important choice about the future of their practice. ADGP is keen to ensure that no GPs are discriminated against in the implementation of the Package and that there is no coercion on practices to opt in.

“We will be providing the facts about the package to GPs to ensure that every practice in Australia is able to make an informed choice about whether or not to opt in.

“An experienced health economist will work with ADGP to develop business cases to assist GPs in different practice settings to make their decision.

“ADGP is also keen to work with the Government to further develop a long term cure for the problems in the primary health care system. Outstanding issues that still need to be addressed include medical indemnity, infrastructure support for general practices and issues relating to overseas trained doctors.

“This package has some potential to resuscitate general practice in the short term – we also need to concentrate on developing the long term cure,” Dr Walters said.

*For comment:*

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