

Response to A Fairer Medicare Better Access, More Affordable

In order to determine GPs' and Divisions' response to the Medicare reform package announced by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health & Ageing on 28 April, ADGP has undertaken the following steps to ensure broad consultation with Divisions, State Based Organisations (SBOs) and their GP members:

- Development of a survey canvassing support for the different elements of the package as well as the package overall;
- Providing a summary of the key elements of the package on the ADGP website and links to Government information on the package;
- Hosting a public forum on the ADGP website to allow individuals to discuss the package with others.

Responses to the survey were cut off at close of business on Tuesday 13 May 2003. A total of 738 complete responses were received, plus an additional 57 that were incomplete (total responses = 795).

Responses were received from all States and Territories, with NSW (188) and Qld (158) providing the highest number of responses.

707 responses (95.7%) were from individual GPs or practices.

Surveys received from Divisions that recorded actual numbers of GP responses were counted as individual responses. Responses that indicated a Divisional position were counted separately as Division responses (n=18). There were 645 responses identified as coming from GPs or practices, while the origin of a further 62 was unclear, although in most cases was assumed to be from individual GPs, based on the comments included in the responses. Two SBOs provided responses to the survey.

Results of the survey are reported below in percentages against each of the questions.

Survey Results

1. GP Access Scheme – commences November 2003.

- **Incentives per bulk billed service to concessional card holder:**

RRMA 1	\$1.00 (estimated annual total per FTE GP with average concessional workload \$3,500 – practices with higher than average number of concessional patients may expect higher incentive payments)
RRMA 2	\$2.95 (estimated annual total \$10,250)
RRMA 3-5	\$5.30 (estimated annual total \$18,500)
RRMA 6-7	\$6.30 (estimated annual total \$22,050)

- Covers all “in-surgery” services, as well as after hours, home visits and aged care facility visits, but not in-hospital procedural services.

DO YOU SUPPORT THE BULK BILLING INCENTIVES?	YES	24.6	NO	75.4
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- **Incentives will be paid as monthly cash payments by the HIC to the practice** (not to individual GPs), based on the number of bulk billed services to card holders and listed by GP provider number.

DO YOU SUPPORT INCENTIVES BEING PAID TO THE PRACTICE AND NOT THE INDIVIDUAL GP?	YES	21.5	NO	78.5
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- **One-off incentive for opt-in practices to support connection to HIC Online** (\$750 metropolitan; \$1,000 rural), including broadband access for rural/remote practices, with 2 day turnaround of payments promised and reduced paperwork. Available February 2004.

DO YOU SUPPORT THE HIC ONLINE INCENTIVE?	YES	46.4	NO	53.6
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- **The GP Access Scheme is voluntary:** GPs can “opt in” or “opt out” – but can **only access the incentives** if they “opt in” to the Scheme.
- **Opt-in practices agree to bulk bill all concessional patients**, which includes holders of Pensioners Card, Health Care Card and Seniors Health Card.
- The Scheme is open to all general practices (accredited and non-accredited practices, VR and non-VR GPs), including Aboriginal Medical Services.
- There are no incentives for practices to bulk bill non-card holders.
- **Practices that wish to “opt in” to the GP Access Scheme will need to register.**
- **All GPs must agree for the practice to opt-in** – this may have implications for employee/principal, associateship/partnership arrangements in practices.

DO YOU SUPPORT THAT ALL GPS IN A PRACTICE MUST AGREE TO OPT IN?	YES	19.2	NO	80.8
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- **Opt-in practices will be advertised to the public** via a 1-800 number and the Department of Health and Ageing website.

DO YOU SUPPORT THE ADVERTISING OF OPT IN PRACTICES?	YES	21.3	NO	78.7
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2. Safety Net

- Commences January 2004
- Government will reimburse 80% of total out of pocket non-hospital medical costs (including any costs over the schedule fee) over \$500 per concessional family or individual per annum. Registration with HIC is required to receive this.
- Non-card holders can opt to buy private health insurance to cover gap payments (the difference between the rebate and the amount charged by the doctor) over \$1,000 (per family) at a cost of around \$50+ per year.

DO YOU SUPPORT THE SAFETY NET AND INSURANCE ELEMENTS?

YES **NO**

3. Veterans

- **\$3.00 additional fee paid** for each LMO consultation to Gold or White Card holders.

DO YOU SUPPORT THE INCENTIVES FOR DVA CONSULTATIONS?

YES **NO**

4. Workforce

- **234 additional medical school places per year** starting 2004 – doctor will be **bonded to areas of workforce shortage** for a minimum of six years after completion of training – does not specifically state that doctor must work in general practice.
- **150 additional GP registrar places per year** to commence in 2004 in areas of workforce shortage – this has implications for Divisions to support.

DO YOU SUPPORT THESE WORKFORCE INITIATIVES?

YES **NO**

***NOTE:** The negative response to the workforce initiative was reflected in comments regarding the bonding of the additional places to areas of workforce shortage. There was concern that such restrictions on these places would make general practice less attractive to medical graduates and could be regarded as conscription.*

- **Extension of practice nurse initiative to areas of workforce shortage** from November 2003: 457 FTE practice nurse places for 800 general practices in areas of workforce shortage, with the option to choose to employ allied health professionals instead. **Only practices that opt in to the GP Access Scheme will be eligible.**

DO YOU SUPPORT EXTENSION OF THE PRACTICE NURSE INITIATIVE TO PRACTICES THAT “OPT IN”?

YES **NO**

***NOTE:** Many respondents commented that the practice nurse initiative should be extended to all practices, not just those that opt in to the bulk billing arrangements.*

GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT HAS SAID THIS IS AN “ALL” OR “NOTHING” PROPOSAL, DO YOU SUPPORT THE MEDICARE REFORM PACKAGE OVERALL?

YES **NO**

For further information contact ADGP on (02) 6228 0800.