



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

03/29

16/05/2003

GPs respond to Government's Medicare Package – survey results

GPs are concerned about a number of components of the Government's *A Fairer Medicare* package, according to a survey of almost 800 GPs conducted by the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP). "The clear message we are getting from the survey is that GPs are strongly opposed to any coercion to bulk bill," Dr Walters, ADGP Chair, said today.

"A majority of GPs have rejected the bulk billing incentives offered by the Government, largely because they are tied to a requirement to bulk bill all services to concession card holders, even those provided after hours or in the patient's home" Dr Walters said. "GPs and their patients do not want compulsion when it comes to fees. GPs always have and always will make allowances for those in need and the package must be flexible enough to allow this.

"GPs have also rejected the requirement that all GPs in a practice must decide whether or not to opt in to the package, with incentive payments going to the practice, rather than the individual GP.

"Higher levels of support were recorded for the workforce initiatives, including the additional medical school places, more GP training places and more practice nurses. However, many GPs rejected the bonding of doctors to specific areas and the restricting of the practice nurse initiative to 'opt in' practices.

"The only components of the package to receive majority support from GPs were the safety-net provisions and the increased rebates for veterans. Almost two-thirds of GPs supported these measures, although many GPs raised concerns about the lack of support provided for GPs to bulk bill low income families and others who do not qualify for a health care card but who may have difficulty affording medical care.

"The survey also found that GPs felt strongly that the new electronic billing system should be available to all practices, not just those that 'opt in'," Dr Walters said.

Dr Walters said that GPs are sending a clear signal through this survey that they do not support the creation of a 'two tier' system of general practice.

"If the Government wants the support of the medical profession for its *A Fairer Medicare* package, it must rethink its approach. Increased funding for rebates, providing more support for city doctors who bulk bill and a de-linking of the practice nurse incentive and the on-line billing from the package would all be positive moves that would improve the equity of the package," Dr Walters said.

"I would also encourage the Government to consider providing more flexibility in the bulk billing requirement of the package so that doctors are able to charge an appropriate co-payment for some services, such as those provided after hours or in the patient's home.

"ADGP also calls on the Government to send a message to medical specialists that they too have a responsibility to ensure their fees are affordable to patients on concession cards, as the gaps charged by specialists are typically much higher than those charged by GPs. Requiring specialists, as well as GPs, to bulk bill services to concessional patients would significantly reduce the burden of health care on people with chronic illnesses and those with high health care expenses.

"I urge the Government to consider these options and work with ADGP and the other GP groups to improve the *A Fairer Medicare* package to make it fairer for all GPs and the community," Dr Walters said.

For comment:

Dr Rob Walters, Chair, ADGP 0418 127 123

For further information:

Jennifer Doggett, Communications Manager 02 6228 0822 or 0403 325 980

Copies of the survey available in the media section of the ADGP website www.adgp.com.au