



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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Medicare changes a step in the right direction, say GPs

GPs will welcome many of the measures in the Government's new Medicare Package announced today, according to Dr Rob Walters of the Australian Divisions of General Practice.

"This significant injection of new funding into Medicare shows that the Government has responded to the community's call for a high quality health system, accessible to all Australians," Dr Walters said.

"The introduction of a new Medicare safety-net will protect people facing large medical expenses, such as people with chronic illnesses and disabilities, young families and the elderly.

"The removal of compulsion for doctors to bulk bill patients is a positive element of this package and will ensure that GPs retain the right to choose who they bulk bill.

"A \$5 increase for bulk billed consultations for concession card holders and children will support those doctors who choose to bulk bill these patients. While ADGP would prefer a general rebate increase for all consultations, this is a clear improvement on the \$1 per consult that was offered to city GPs in the first Medicare package.

"It is encouraging that the Government has listened to the concerns of Divisions of General Practice in re-designing this package. A number of measures in the package, including the new aged care item number, MBS item numbers for nurses, additional funding for GPs who supervise doctors in training and support for GP proceduralists, have been raised by ADGP and Divisions in our consultations with Government.

"In particular, the workforce measures that aim to increase the numbers of GPs by 1500 by 2007 and attract 1600 more nurses into general practice, will be supported by the medical profession. The Government has clearly got the message that we simply do not have enough doctors and nurses in general practice to meet demand.

"Support for a team approach to primary health care, through funding additional practice nurses, will increase consumer access to community-based health care and give GPs more time to focus on providing essential medical services to their patients.

"GPs and patients will also welcome the introduction of simplified electronic billing systems that enable patients to receive their rebate at the point of service rather than claiming it back through the Medicare system.

"ADGP is hosting 1000 GPs, Divisions staff and other health sector representatives at our National Forum this weekend in Brisbane. Minister Abbott will be speaking at the Forum on Saturday 22nd November and I know that all delegates will welcome this opportunity to hear him outline the changes to the package in more detail.

"I look forward to discussing the changes to the new Medicare Package with my GP and Divisional colleagues at the Forum and obtaining their feedback on the impact it will have on general practice over the long term," Dr Walters said.

For comment:

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