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**Department of Health**

# Primary Health Reform Consultation Group Meeting Summary

Monday, 25 November 2019

## Introduction

The Australian Government released its Long Term National Health Plan in August 2019 which outlines its vision to modernise Australia's health system to make it more integrated, more efficient, more focused on patients and more equitable. Under the first pillar of the Long Term National Health Plan, the Government has committed to develop and implement a Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan (10 Year Plan).

The Department of Health convened the first Consultation Group meeting on 25 November 2019 in Melbourne to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the future of primary health care reform in Australia.

## Attendance

Over 100 organisations across the health sector including medical practitioners, consumers and provider organisations were invited to the Consultation Group meeting. A list of organisations represented at the meeting is at [Attachment A](#).

## Minister's Address

The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, delivered a video address which included the following points:

- Australia is the second leading health system in the world, according to the Commonwealth Fund. However, access to primary health care is a challenge, particularly in rural and remote areas and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Australia has an ageing society and due to age and lifestyle there is an increase in the incidence of chronic diseases, particularly co-morbidities.
- The Consultation Group needs to consider primary health care within the broader context of the Long Term National Health Plan, where the Government has set a pathway for the broader health system.
- The role of the Consultation Group is to help identify challenges to primary health care services and delivery and, through a collaborative process, help design solutions for consideration by the Government.
- The priorities for the 10 Year Plan are:
  - **Flexibility in care delivery** – In addition to Medicare, there is a need to build a direct relationship between the patient and the General Practitioner that will allow for access through telephone, text, email and the ability to call a Practice Nurse. The voluntary patient enrolment measure for Australians aged 70 years and over is the



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first step towards establishing a flexible care model that will be built over the coming decade.

- **Access in rural and remote Australia** – To focus on the needs of rural and remote Australians and to consider a combination of telehealth, Medicare and state-based systems with potentially a blended funding system. There is an opportunity to provide a series of flexible models. More can be learnt from the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector where doctors, allied health and practice nurses work together either at a central location or through hub and spoke models, ensuring continuity of care between the care team and the patient.
- **Workforce** – A need to consider teaching, training and attracting the workforce to rural and remote Australia where doctors, nurses and allied health workers have the opportunity to understand and develop their medical expertise in a rural context. Also the need to train specialists and retain General Practitioners through flexible models of care.
- **Future-focused** – The National Preventive Health Strategy is being developed in parallel to the 10 Year Plan and we need to look at emerging waves of treatment, including precision medicine, stem cell therapies and how genomics can provide treatment and diagnosis for patients anywhere.
- **Mental health** - Consideration needs to be given to the mental health of the workforce, community and patients and what needs to be done to improve and strengthen our mental health system.

## Address by Primary Health Reform Steering Group Co-Chairs

Dr Steve Hambleton and Dr Walid Jammal, Co-Chairs of the Primary Health Reform Steering Group set the scene for the meeting. They presented the main challenges in the primary health care system, outlined the Australian Government’s priorities under the Long Term National Health Plan and the development of the 10 Year Plan, and highlighted the scope of the reform.

A copy of the presentation slides is at [Attachment B](#).

## Interactive panel discussion

Members of the panel were Dr Steve Hambleton, Dr Walid Jammal, Dr Ewen McPhee, President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Ms Cathy Baynie, National President of the Australian Association of Practice Management, and Mr Simon Cotterell PSM, First Assistant Secretary, Primary Care Division, Department of Health. The following issues and themes were discussed:

- The importance of system integration and improved coordination between primary health care services and acute health care.
- In a patient enrolment model, consideration needs to be given to what the benefits are to the consumer.



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- Consumer advocates need to work with providers to understand the appropriate questions to ask their patients.
- There is a need for the health system to focus on patient and community-centred care.
- Valuing team-based care arrangements.
- Need to strengthen the health care system by building on existing arrangements and increase the number of generalists who are multi-skilled.
- To consider social determinants of health and for Government to consider health across various portfolios and levels of government.

### **Concurrent themed discussion**

The Consultation Group was broken into smaller groups to workshop the following three themes:

- Themed discussion A: How do we ensure equitable access and keep people well in the community?
- Themed discussion B: How do we ensure continuity of care and whole-of-system integration?
- Themed discussion C: How do we ensure the health system is ready for the future?

To assist in discussions, each invitee was provided with a handout that included the draft objectives and enablers of the 10 Year Plan. A copy of the handout is at [Attachment C](#).

### **Feedback on themed discussion**

The discussions were summarised and presented to the Consultation Group by Steering Group members. This summary is at [Attachment D](#).

### **Reflections and next steps**

It was agreed that:

- The Department would circulate the summary of the Consultation Group meeting to all invitees.
- Feedback from the discussion will inform the 10 Year Plan.
- The next Consultation Group meetings will be held in early 2020 and mid-2020, with dates and locations to be confirmed.