

Australian College of
Rural & Remote Medicine
WORLD LEADERS IN RURAL PRACTICE



AIDA
AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS
DOCTORS' ASSOCIATION



RACGP



**RURAL DOCTORS
ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA**

Communique

National Council of Primary Care Doctors

21 September 2021

GPs are in the trenches: more investment is needed in delivering care on the frontline

The National Council of Primary Care Doctors (NCPCD)* has come together to progress key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of Australians.

In its most recent meeting, the main areas of ongoing concern were around the progression of the Primary Care Review and the resulting lack of funding for General Practice services, the pressures on the GP workforce over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and the engagement of GPs across the scope of disaster planning.

Dr Karen Price, NCPCD and RACGP President, said that there were significant issues involving Primary Care and the NCPCD provided a pivotal consensus voice on a number of issues going to government.

“We have major concerns about the direction of the Primary Care Review, with not a single dollar allocated directly to GP services coming out of this so far.

“Yes, there is some investment available for GP Practices as a business, but not for the GP services provided.

“The focus of this review was meant to support GPs who provide usual care to a patient and improve patient outcomes.

“What we need is a model that is GP-led, patient-centred and promotes multidisciplinary team care. Savings generated by the review need to be transparently reinvested into general practice care, and savings through avoidable hospital admissions also should be redirected to further enhance primary care services.

“NCPCD members strongly agreed that if Government wants industry support for the outcomes, then this is the model needed,” Dr Price said.

Across the General Practice sector there are significant and increasing issues in relation to the added workforce pressures resulting from COVID border closures. Many doctors, particularly in rural areas, haven’t taken leave. With already significant workforce shortages in these areas, there is concern of burnout/long term fatigue. There is a risk of losing a higher number of the current permanent workforce as a result.

The COVID effect is also heavily impacting on FIFO workforce that support many rural sites.

“We need to look at measures that can increase the ability of clinicians to move across borders in ways that do not put the community at risk,” Dr Price said.

“This may include rapid antigen testing, mandatory vaccination for traveling clinicians, regular testing prior to and after arrival, coupled with shorter quarantine periods.

“We need to urgently look at ways of mobilising our primary care workforce to support those in areas that are suffering critical shortages.”

Disaster planning across Australia is another area with ongoing issues about workforce, with current local disaster plans being incomplete due to the lack of GP input. GPs must be engaged at local and state levels or these plans will fail.

“With the majority of disasters in Australia occurring in rural areas, the local GP and Rural Generalist (RG) workforce carry the burden of the medical response,” Dr Price said.

“Currently, the engagement of GPs by the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) is very patchy.

“GPs and RGs need to be involved in disaster planning, particularly as it relates to workforce and supervision needs. A national register needs to be developed of appropriately skilled and trained GPs/RGs to be clinical leads.

“The pandemic response has highlighted that issues such as PPE distribution, GP Respiratory Clinic establishment, and COVID vaccine roll-out need a whole-of-community approach, not the current State vs Federal model, which has resulted in confusion and shortages.”

Together the National Council of Primary Care Doctors will continue to strongly advocate for General Practice, and provide consensus advice to Government on issues affecting Primary Care.

<Ends>

**The National Council of Primary Care Doctors (NCPCD) represents the interests of general practice and primary care in Australia, comprising leaders from the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Royal*

Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), General Practice Supervisors Australia (GPSA), General Practice Registrars Australia (GPRA) and Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA).

Contacts:

RDAA: Ineke Kuiper, 0408 669 638

ACRRM: Petrina Smith, 0414 820 847

AMA: AMA Media on 02 6270 5478 or media@ama.com.au

RACGP: John Ronan 0428 122 357