

Monday, 27 July 2009



For immediate release

Federal health reform a risk for Victoria

Victoria's public health system already boasts many of the features the federal government wants implemented nationally, a peak Victorian public health body says.

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) welcomed today's National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission's (NHHRC) final report for its commitment to prevention, equity and efficiency.

But the VHA's board chair, Tony Graham, said many of the recommendations – such as the recommendation to ensure emergency departments had beds available at all times - would be difficult to achieve due to ongoing workforce shortages, particularly in rural areas.

"Many of our member health services in rural areas recently received extra federal funding to reduce surgical waiting lists but struggled to meet this challenge due to ongoing workforce shortages," Mr Graham said.

On the funding front, the VHA welcomes any moves to efficiency based funding models but cautions that this approach has its limitations.

"The NHHRC report recommends the introduction of casemix funding nationally. This system has been in place in Victoria for about a decade and is an excellent tool to ensure efficiency, but not in all circumstances," Mr Graham said.

"The VHA's recently commissioned research by Access Economics found the casemix model was unsuited to small rural health services that cannot control their throughput due to remoteness from alternate health services."

The VHA supports many of the NHHRC's recommendations including:

- **Rural health:** "Top-up" funding for rural and remote communities that do not access their fair share of Medicare funding due to workforce shortages. The VHA believes any extra funding should be directed to local providers and should not duplicate existing services
- **Primary healthcare:** The federal government's decision to invest in better resourced primary healthcare is a good use of public resources. One note of caution is that Victoria already has a unique system of community health services that must be included into a national approach
- **Information technology:** The commitment to e-Health and personal electronic health records has long been VHA policy. Of major importance is the interoperability of IT systems between health services and improving communication between health professionals to reduce errors
- **Reshaping the Medicare Benefits Schedule:** Redefining the scope of services that attract Medicare funding is a vital component of health reform. This is a key policy aim of the VHA along with expanded roles for qualified health professionals to reduce the burden on general practitioners
- **National Access Targets:** The VHA supports the concept of National Access Targets across all health services but these must be developed carefully, with community consultation

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Victorian Healthcare Association

The Victorian Healthcare Association is the major peak body representing the public healthcare sector in Victoria. Our members include public hospitals, rural and regional health services, community health services and aged care facilities. Established since 1938, the VHA promotes improvement of health outcomes for all Victorians from the perspective of its members.

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