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Media release

Putting the future in Victorian healthcare planning

Victoria's peak public healthcare body this week released its policy mandate for the future direction of the state's public healthcare system that calls for major structural reform.

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) has identified critical challenges that threaten the sustainability of Victoria's public healthcare system.

Its chief executive, Mr Trevor Carr, says these challenges include:

- Workforce shortages that are already chronic in rural areas
- An ageing population and workforce
- Rising rates of preventable chronic disease
- A lack of investment in data collection to better plan health services
- Inflexible workforce structures and practises
- Under investment in preventative health programs based on population health approaches
- The cost and suitability of information technology systems for healthcare services

Victoria has an innovative public healthcare system, but that system will be unsustainable without major structural reform and a renewed focus on preventative health strategies to reduce the burden on already overcrowded public hospitals.

The VHA wants the Victorian government to begin work immediately on a 10-year health plan to meet the state's future health needs. This plan must cover the costs of asset depreciation that is a major problem for all health services.

"It is unacceptable that Victoria currently lacks a long-term capital infrastructure plan for the future health needs of this state. Such a plan is vital to ensure systematic planning is in line with pre-determined priorities that meet the community's health needs," Mr Carr said.

The VHA released its blueprint – [Directions 2009](#) – at its annual conference [Realising Reform](#) in Melbourne last month.

One debate – Are doctors the cornerstone of primary healthcare? – raised much discussion.

Mr Carr said the Australian Medical Association's latest report – *General Practice in Primary Care* – that defends the role of GPs as the cornerstone of the current health system demonstrates the entrenched interests that make the reform process a difficult one for governments.

One of the VHA's strategic priorities - outlined in [Directions 2009](#) – is the maintenance of a contemporary health workforce structured to meet the changing needs of Victorians.

The VHA supports diversifying the scope of practice of existing health professionals to include the use of nurse practitioners and other allied health professionals to perform roles traditionally undertaken by doctors.

"There has to be structural reform of the health system and this will require changes to the role of all health professionals or the system will not be able to meet community expectations in the future," Mr Carr said.

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"The workforce needs to change and doctors need to accept that this is important."

To better inform its research mandate, the VHA has commissioned Access Economics to conduct research into the attributes and deficiencies of the current funding system underpinning Victoria's public healthcare system.

This research is due for release in December and will better inform the VHA's policy work on behalf of members and the general public.

"Spending on health is increasing at unsustainable rates, making the reform mandate all the more urgent. What is needed is structural reform to ensure more effective and efficient use of finite resources," Mr Carr said.

"What the VHA wants to know is how the current funding system is working, what are its deficiencies and how can we work to overcome those to maximise the system's productivity."

A copy of the VHA's [Directions 2009](#) document is attached.

The VHA 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 the improvement of health outcomes for all Victorians from the perspective of its members."

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