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For immediate release

Federal health reform a risky business for Victoria – peak body warns

Federal government moves to take over primary healthcare from the states may be a risky business for Victoria, a peak public health body has warned.

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) supports the need for better resourced primary healthcare but believes Victoria's unique system may be undermined by the administrative burden of a federal approach.

The comments follow today's release of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission report that canvasses increased Federal Government responsibility for healthcare outside the hospital system.

The VHA's chief executive, Mr Trevor Carr, welcomed the report's sentiments but was cautious about what some of the key recommendations may mean for Victoria that boasts a primary healthcare system that is already the envy of other states.

"Our concern is that Victoria is already well served by its network of stand alone and integrated community health services that provide access to multidisciplinary primary healthcare services in metropolitan and rural areas," Mr Carr said.

"In principle, we don't oppose the creation of Comprehensive Primary Health Care Centres but in practice we need more detail about the interplay with Victoria's existing community health services.

"The VHA is concerned that the need to serve two masters – the states and the commonwealth – will only increase the administrative burdens on a health system already heavy on paperwork."

Option A of the report proposes continued shared responsibility for health with the federal government to take over all responsibility and funding for primary healthcare and pay the states 40 per cent of the cost of inpatient and emergency department treatment.

Mr Carr said this figure required greater scrutiny but seemed on the lower side of acceptable options.

Key components of the NHHRC report the VHA can comment on include:

- **E-Health records** – the VHA believes investment in this should be a top priority and is long overdue to facilitate sharing of vital patient data between health professionals
- **Sub-acute services** – improving funding and equity of access to sub-acute care is vital to prevent hospital readmissions and investment in infrastructure via the Health and Hospitals Infrastructure Fund is welcomed
- **Healthy Australia 2020 Goals** – creating a focus on rolling national health goals linked to key performance benchmarks could help to make inroads into Australia's preventable chronic disease epidemic
- **Improving health literacy** – including this as part of the national education curriculum will assist people to make better health choices
- **Dental** – the concept of universal public dental coverage is supported but the size of the Medicare Levy increase to fund it requires closer scrutiny
- **Establishment of Comprehensive Primary Health Care Centres** – with voluntary enrolled populations to facilitate easier access to multidisciplinary care is laudable but how this sits with Victoria's existing network of community health services is unclear

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- **National Access Targets** – the VHA applauds the federal government's recognition that the concept of "elective" treatments is a misnomer, as many of these procedures are critical diagnostic events, and we support subjecting both emergency care and elective treatments to targets, rewarded by bonus payments
- **Workforce** – broadening the range of medical professionals who can access the Medicare Benefit's Schedule will address equity of access issues caused by GP shortages in both rural and remote and outer metropolitan areas
- **Rural and Remote** – Improving access to telemedicine by allowing more than one medical practitioner to bill Medicare for a consultation at the same time will facilitate wider use of this service and an expansion of the patient travel and accommodation assistance scheme is welcome

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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