



6 March 2013

GP LEADERS DEMAND NO BUDGET CUTS TO GP CARE

Australia's GP leaders – United General Practice Australia (UGPA) – met in Canberra today to discuss a range of issues affecting general practice, with the primary focus on the Government's current review of Medicare rebates for patients with chronic and complex disease.

UGPA members unanimously called on the Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, to immediately rule out any cuts to Medicare support for quality GP care in the May budget.

UGPA recommends that the Government review should focus on:

- better supporting long-term structured care for patients;
- strengthening the role of the usual GP;
- better linking access to allied health services with the clinical needs of the patient; and
- reducing red tape.

The leaders said that the Government must recognise the key role that general practice plays in caring for patients with chronic diseases.

The Medicare chronic disease rebates were introduced to support well-structured care for patients with their usual GP and to facilitate appropriate access to other health care professionals.

UGPA supports the intent of these items, while acknowledging that they involve significant red tape. UGPA believes that there is significant scope to improve these items so that they work better for patients and GPs alike.

Patients currently have good access to quality and structured chronic disease management. While UGPA recognises the fiscal pressures that the Government faces, withdrawing funding for the care of patients with complex and chronic disease cannot be justified.

Many of these patients are among the most vulnerable in society and we cannot support any measure that might reduce their access to quality GP care or lead to higher out-of-pocket costs for patients.

The care of these patients is complex, requires additional time, and involves more non-face-to-face work than the average patient.

The viability of the general practice team – including general practice nurses – needs to be maintained and strengthened to support these patients and manage their care.

Any attempt to achieve short-term Budget savings would lead to increased long-term costs to the health system, including through increased costs to Medicare, the PBS, and the hospital system.

UGPA comprises the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Australian Medical Association (AMA), the Australian Medicare Local Alliance (AMLA), the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN), General Practice Registrars Australia (GPRA), the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA).

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