

Stronger Medicare requires more patient focus

The Turnbull Government's aim to strengthen Medicare through the Health Care Homes model is good news but will need strong clinical leadership and patient confidence and engagement in design and delivery if it is to attract patient support.

"The Consumers Health Forum welcomes the Prime Minister's announcement today of stage one of Health Care Homes," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"But if it is to be a "revolutionary" development in care of the chronically ill, as Mr Turnbull says, Health Care Homes will need to be focused on the individual needs of patients.

"That will require a revolutionary commitment to substantially more money and to a truly comprehensive national undertaking.

"The reform opens an opportunity to strengthen Medicare by getting the balance of health investments right with more emphasis on primary health care. The evidence is that strongly performing health systems have a solid primary health care backbone

"At the moment we are seeing a somewhat scattered approach, with some federally financed pilot programs while separately some Primary Health Networks are also commissioning joined-up care services.

"The stage one plan is to attract 65,000 patients in 200 GP clinics. Both patients and doctors will need to be convinced there is more support being offered to focus on the overall needs of chronic patient care.

"The \$21 million funding allocated for this stage one of Health Care Homes (HCH) is about one-hundredth of Medicare's current expenditure. A further \$90 million in payments to support patient care is a redirection of money from existing Medicare payments to GPs.

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-2-

“The announcement of the ten regions for the initial rollout of the Health Care Homes (HCH) is an increase from the seven originally proposed. The start of HCH should mean better-coordinated care for people with chronic illness.

“General practices in the chosen areas around Australia can now look at whether or not they want to participate

“We want to see HCH as part of an integrated approach –working with other parts of the health system such as allied health practitioners and pharmacists to be integrated to ensure joined-up care.

“State and territory health agencies and some of the Primary Health Networks have already started working with general practices in their regions to develop new models and ways of working.

“That work should be used to inform the development of an effective chronic care system.

“HCH needs to be part of that process – not as a separate “silo” which does not have strong connections to the rest of the system

“HCH has the potential to transform the way people with chronic diseases receive care but only if it is adequately resourced and supported,” Ms Wells said.

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