

## Patient care gaps highlight need for health reforms

People in rural and low income areas continue to face significant disadvantages in getting health care, highlighting the need for Government health reforms to be targeted where need is greatest, the Consumers Health Forum says.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics today released its annual patient experience survey which shows that while most Australians seem satisfied with health services, there remain significant numbers who are not getting the care they need when they need it, the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“Australians like to think of their health system as being very good by world standards, but this survey shows there remain significant pockets of ill-health where the Government’s proposed reforms of chronic care could make a significant impact.

“The results are a reminder of how central the general practice setting is to our health system. Well over 80% of people saw a GP in the previous 12 months, 80% felt their GP always showed them respect and over three quarters said their GP always spent enough time with them. For many (61%), the health professional most likely to coordinate their care is a GP.

“The results highlight the value the community places in accessible and affordable quality general practice and tell us that the Government’s Health Care Home initiative is a very promising initiative and should be given every chance of being a success.

“While there have been modest improvements in access to GPs, there are still nearly one in five Australians who waited longer than they felt acceptable to get an appointment and that proportion rises to nearly one in four when it comes to waiting to see a medical specialist.

“One in ten people living in areas of greatest disadvantage delayed or decided against filling a prescription because of cost, double the proportion of people living in better-off suburbs.

“These figures, along with the relatively low level of insurance, 34 per cent, in the lowest socio-economic areas, makes it clear that the Government’s primary care reforms and the role of the new Primary Health Networks need strong support and resourcing to deliver the right care where it is needed most.

“The figures convey the scale of the challenge in care for those with chronic illness, showing that 16 per cent of people saw three or more health professionals for the same condition. Although most report that their GP coordinates care, many also report issues caused by lack of communication.

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“The PHNs offer scope for health services to be better coordinated to ensure the right care reaches those who need it most.

“Another sharp reminder of the gaps in the Australian health system is in dental care. More than a quarter of Australians in disadvantaged put off seeing a dentist because of cost,” Ms Wells said.

“This patient experience survey provides a vital annual insight into the health care experience in Australia that helps guide us towards improvements. Given the importance and scale of the \$150 billion health effort, the survey is too valuable to be scrapped.”

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