

National Health Plan opens way for reform

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The National Health Plan announced by Health Minister Greg Hunt today is an encouraging step forward particularly in mental health and preventive health, the Consumers Health Forum says.

The longterm plan includes a fresh focus on children's mental health with a new strategy specifically for children under 12, the development of a National Preventive Health Strategy, research on screening for lung cancer and measures to reduce smoking rate to below 10 per cent of the population. The Minister has also announced a \$90 million Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study to be carried out over the next three years.

"The Minister is to be congratulated on the breadth of his initiatives to improve health outcomes, particularly for Australia's First Nations People, including through measures tackling the social factors which play a significant role in poor health status," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"The four key reform pillars outlined by the Minister --- guaranteeing Medicare and access to medicines, supporting public and private hospitals, prioritising mental health and preventive health and investing in health and medical research --- are all central parts of an effective health system.

"The Government will implement a 10-year Primary Health Care Plan. We have previously welcomed the flexible primary care plan previously announced as a worthwhile start to helping the elderly patients access GP care more easily.

"However we believe we need to see a comprehensive strategy for integrated primary health care to bring all of these elements together to drive better health outcomes.

"Real progress to make the best of our health system should support personalised patient-focused services such as those which bring care for physical and mental health together, that include "social prescribing" to reduce isolation, that counter unhealthy socio-economic disadvantage and that stimulate better lifestyles to combat endemic overweight and obesity.

"A more 'wrap-around' health system that generates happier and healthier people need not break the budget but would require significant changes.

"The National Health Plan opens the way for reform," Ms Wells said.

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