

Health information and service coordination key to better health

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A new report shows that Australia still has some way to go to ensure our healthcare is accessible and works effectively for all Australians, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

The findings of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on patient experiences of information sharing between providers released today state that while the majority of patients are receiving enough information about their healthcare and have providers who are informed about their care, those who need it most are the ones who experience the greatest barriers to coordinated care, said the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells.

“With almost half of the Australian population now living with chronic disease, it’s time for our health system to catch up with the way our health care needs are changing,” Ms Wells said.

“The AIHW report finds that of patients who rated their health as poor, 1 in 5 reported not receiving enough information about their care and treatment, compared to 1 in 25 who rate their health as excellent.

“Consumers with poor-self assessed health status are more likely to need coordinated care across multiple health providers and are most likely to experience poor outcomes when information is not properly shared.

“If you are well then the system works as it should, but for those with multiple chronic or complex conditions it is harder to get the care needed in a coordinated way,” said Ms Wells.

“This report also shows that language and distance are additional barriers to ensuring consumers experience coordinated care and are provided the information they need to self-manage their condition.

“The report highlights the intractable problems that emerge when people move between care systems. Almost 1 in 4 patients who visited a hospital emergency department reported that there was inadequate sharing of information back to their usual GP or place of care.

“Of patients who were admitted to hospital, 14% reported that their usual GP or place of care was not informed of their follow-up needs, and for those that required services after their hospital admission, 1 in 5 reported that arrangements were not made by the hospital.

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Consumers shaping health

“For the most part, Australian have access to high quality health care services, although the further you are from a major centre the less this is the case. The issue we have is that services are clearly not as linked up and person-centred as they should be.

“Transitions of care remain a problem and is a source of major concerns such as poor discharge planning, medication misadventure and other risks to a person’s quality and safety.

“This data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare coincides with a special four-part series, *Health Divide* run by ABC 7.30 which exposed many of the shortfalls in our health system and the action we need to take to remedy them.

“We know from our own recent CHF research of Australians with two or more chronic conditions that those with higher levels of activation – knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their own health – have higher self-reported outcomes and experiences in the healthcare system.

“The key enablers to ensuring patients can achieve better outcomes include timely health information and, for those with complex needs, assistance to navigate available services.

“Health is more than hospitals and access to medicines and current Medicare arrangements are rapidly becoming outmoded. We need additional investment in fit-for-purpose primary care arrangements that take an integrated approach to care and prevention of chronic illness. CHF has long advocated for a person-centred system that:

- Adopts new and different models of funding and delivering coordinated care, including digital innovations
- Ensures the existing workforce is better distributed and working in teams
- Supports consumers to play a central role in actively managing their health through measures such as self-management support and social prescribing – a way of linking patients in primary care with sources of support within the community
- Invests in measures to assist GPs and patients leverage patient activation to navigate the range of services they need to exercise choice and control in their health care.

“We need to tip the scales to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention in primary care. By supporting consumers to self-manage their own healthcare we can reduce pressure on primary care, reduce avoidable hospitalisations and, most importantly, improve health and wellbeing outcomes for the community,” said Ms Wells.

CHF looks forward to working with Government and stakeholders to shape ten-year plans for Australia’s primary health care system and prevention.

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