

11 May 2010

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



Federal Budget recognises the central role of general practice

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' response to Australian Government 2010-11 Health & Ageing Budget

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has long advocated for significant increases in the general practice workforce, stronger teams and better team work within general practice, better general practice infrastructure and investment in e-health.

The direct investment that general practice has been waiting for has been delivered in today's Federal Budget.

The college is very pleased that the Federal Government has delivered on its commitments in today's budget and that the investment reaffirms the central role of general practice and primary health care in our health system.

The Federal Government today announced that 94 of the 123 National Health and Hospital Reform Commission's recommendations, all of the National Primary Health Care Strategy recommendations and a third of the Preventative Health Taskforce recommendations will be implemented.

Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President and GP in northern New South Wales, said that this is a remarkable investment in general practice given Australia's current economic situation.

"I am delighted to see the direct investment into general practice workforce, general practice teams and in e-health. General practice will work with these new resources to improve Australia's health outcomes," said Dr Mitchell.

General practice workforce and training

Our current general practice workforce is ageing, with the average age of vocationally recognised GPs now over 50 years. Investment in general practice training is critically important to combat general practice workforce shortages throughout Australia.

There have been significant and much needed increases in prevocational and vocational GP training places, which will contribute to addressing workforce shortages across Australia.

The number of prevocational training places will be increased from 400 to 975 by 2013-2014 and the number of vocational training places will be increased from 812 to 1200 by 2014.

The college warmly welcomes the government's commitment to increasing the number of general practice training places.

Stronger teams and better team work

The RACGP has long advocated for stronger teams and better team work within general practice.

Today's Federal Budget confirmed a significant increase in support for general practice nurses across Australia through direct investment for general practices to employ nurses in order to better meet the health needs of their communities.

Practice nurses have played an important role in general practice for many years and the college strongly supports nursing in general practice to enhance the quality of care provided to patients.

General practice infrastructure grants

One of the most important budget elements for general practice is that the Federal Government has provided infrastructure grants to assist general practice. The RACGP and United General Practice Australia, the united voice for general practice in Australia, have been strongly advocating for direct investment in GP infrastructure.

Additional infrastructure for general practice is essential to deliver improved patient access to comprehensive, integrated multidisciplinary care across Australia (including the expansion of the practice nursing workforce) and increases GPs' capacity to teach the next generation of health practitioners to ensure a robust health workforce in the future.

In the past, general practice has not seen the investment in infrastructure it needs, but this budget has delivered desperately needed investment.

e-health investment

The college has long advocated for investment in e-health and commends the Federal Government for the significant contribution in e-health initiatives over the next two years. This investment will increase patient health outcomes.

There are currently around 115 million GP consultations taking place annually and computers are now used by 98 per cent of GPs for clinical purposes. General practice is in an ideal position to be at the forefront of e-health.

Without improvements in e-health and medical information management systems we will continue to expose patients to unnecessary risks, including adverse events and medication errors. Every person in Australia should receive care that is informed by an electronic health summary.

Major cost saving can be achieved from a reduced number of tests and better management of chronic diseases supported by evidence-based guidelines.

e-health is about improving our patients' health outcomes. As general practitioners we understand the importance of e-health to the future of our healthcare system.

Primary Health Care Organisations

The college welcomes the new funding to establish primary health care organisations building on the existing networks and divisions of general practice.

As a key supporter of regionalisation through both the divisional movement and the delivery of regional general practice training, the RACGP welcomes the strengthening of primary health care services and direct investment in patients' health at a local level.

The college is keen to work with government to ensure the work of primary health care organisations complement the important work of GPs in improving the health of patients.

“More GPs and increases in general practice funding will lead to better health outcomes, enhanced health prevention, better management of chronic illness and lower rates of unnecessary hospital admissions. By allocating health funds appropriately, our government has recognised that the most efficient and effective health care takes place in the community setting. This will only serve to benefit our patients,” concluded Dr Mitchell.

The RACGP will continue to work with the Australian Government to ensure investments in general practice meet the needs of our communities.

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Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President, is available for media interviews. Please call 0424 461 622 to arrange an interview

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice, and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners. Visit www.racgp.org.au.