



COAG Health Council

Communique 13 April 2018

The federal, state and territory Health Ministers met in Sydney today at the COAG Health Council to discuss a range of national health issues. The meeting was chaired by the Ms Meegan Fitzharris MLA, ACT Minister for Health and Wellbeing.

Ms Fitzharris welcomed to their first COAG Health Council meeting the Hon Dr Steven Miles MP, Queensland Minister for Health, and the Hon Stephen Wade MLC, South Australian Minister for Health and Wellbeing.

Major items discussed by Health Ministers today included:

Review of the organ donation, retrieval and transplant system

Ministers agreed that the Commonwealth undertake a review of the organ donation, retrieval and transplantation sector in collaboration with states and territories. The review will examine (pre and post) transplantation services and identify barriers to equity of access to transplant waiting lists and transplantation services.

The review will inform the development of a long-term strategy for organ retrieval and transplantation which will build on the Government's national reform agenda on organ and tissue donation and transplantation.

It is anticipated that a progress update, including any early findings from the review, will be provided to Ministers in August 2018.

Digital Health Update

Ministers agreed in principle to a new Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health (IGA) for the period 2018-2022. This will replace the existing IGA which is due to expire on 30 June 2018. The IGA provides funding to the Australian Digital Health Agency to operate effective national digital health capability, including national digital health systems, supporting foundations, standards and infrastructure.

Real time prescription monitoring

The Ministers agreed to progress national real time prescription monitoring as a federated model with jurisdictions committed to progressing development and adaptation of systems to connect to and interface with Commonwealth systems to achieve a national solution.

Increasing the minimum legal age of tobacco purchase to 21 years

Health Ministers discussed a proposal to increase the minimum legal age of tobacco purchase to 21 years, and agreed to refer that proposal to Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council with input from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for advice.

Mandatory reporting requirements under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law

Today Ministers agreed unanimously to take steps to protect patients and strengthen the law to remove barriers for registered health professionals to seek appropriate treatment for impairments including mental health.

Ministers agreed to a nationally consistent approach to mandatory reporting which will be drafted and proposes exemptions from the reporting of notifiable conduct by treating practitioners (noting Western Australia's current arrangements are retained) and subject to other jurisdictional formal approval in certain circumstances.

The legislation will include strong protection for patients and will remove barriers for registered health professionals to seek appropriate treatment. The legislation will specifically include a requirement to report past, present and the risk of future sexual misconduct and a requirement to report current and the risk of future instances of intoxication at work and practice outside of accepted standards.

Western Australia endorsed continuance of its current approach that has been operational in WA since 2010 for treating health practitioners. Health practitioners in a treating relationship based on the reasonable belief can make a voluntary notification as part of their ethical obligations in relation to any type of misconduct.

Progress Update on National Health Agreement

The Commonwealth Minister for Health re-iterated the Government's hospital funding offer as outlined to COAG on 9 February 2018. Work on the implementation of the Health Innovation Fund with WA and NSW has commenced.

Streamlining the application and approval process for unregistered medical cannabis products

Ministers agreed today to support the Commonwealth in collaboration with the states and territories to progress the development of a single national online application pathway to access unregistered medicinal cannabis products.

The proposal is to streamline access to medicinal cannabis by developing a single entry point that covers both the Commonwealth and state and territory application and approval processes for unregistered medicinal cannabis products. This process would avoid duplication of decisions regarding clinical appropriateness while maintaining separate approvals by the states and territories necessary in managing appropriate access to Schedule 8 products.

Overseas medical professionals

Health Ministers supported the importance of trained and experienced medical personnel in all areas of Australia subject to and consistent with priority longstanding principles of employment first going to Australian citizens and consistent with First Minister's agreement on intern places.

They agree to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth to ensure that there are streamlined and simple visa arrangements to support pathways for overseas students graduating in Australia and senior international medical graduates.

The Commonwealth committed to providing relevant information on medical places across Australia by the end of May 2018.

Improving the primary care response to family violence

Health Ministers confirmed their commitment to improving the primary care response to people experiencing family violence. In consultation with other jurisdictions, Victoria has undertaken extensive work to identify barriers to primary care practitioners identifying and responding to those people experiencing family violence.

To progress this important issue, Ministers agreed that relevant stakeholders would be consulted on the role and scope of primary care in responding to family violence, asked to identify barriers that may impact on primary care providers performing this role and recommend options to address this issue. This consultation was recommended to occur at the previously announced Commonwealth Family Violence Roundtable. Following the Roundtable, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council will report back to Health Ministers on a preferred option to improve primary care responses to family violence and outline how this should be progressed.

In addition Ministers agreed to develop further training materials and resources with Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and to scope the implementation of a trial on family violence training in two jurisdictions via the Primary Health Networks.

Annual national funding determination

Ministers agreed that the finalisation of annual funding determinations in a timely manner is important to ensure funding certainty for all jurisdictions and will prioritise work to complete all steps including data clean-up to finalise the data reconciliation process.

The Commonwealth has agreed to develop a time bound process for current and future determinations including a dispute resolution mechanism.

Victoria maintained its concerns regarding the 2015–16 determination.

Impact of the National Bowel Cancer Screening expansion on colonoscopy demand and waiting times

Today Ministers discussed the importance of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program and its expansion to offer biennial screening for all eligible Australians aged 50-74 by 2020.

However, a key impact of the Program and its expansion is the increased volume of people requiring diagnostic assessment through colonoscopy.

Health Ministers agreed that the Commonwealth and states and territories should work together to ensure that future infrastructure and workforce capacity and development are better matched to the expected increase in demand.

Endometriosis Action Plan for Australia

Ministers noted that an action plan is being developed by the Commonwealth to ensure practicable and achievable outcomes for the women of Australia, in acknowledgment of the significant impact on thousands of women and families.

The Commonwealth will provide the draft action plan to jurisdictions to identify further key areas of research, awareness and education, and clinical management and care that may contribute to the action plan under development

Next meeting

Health Ministers have agreed that they will next meet in Alice Springs, Northern Territory and will include a significant focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues.

Media contact: Kay McNiece 0448 207 226