

Benefitting from our health system requires having access to it

06 August 2024



‘Primary health care is about keeping people well, but this requires being able to access it. It is the reason why Medicare was introduced, and yet 40 years later, our primary care system is struggling,’ says Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) Chief Executive Ms Kylie Woolcock.

‘Australia has [more doctors per head of population](#) than the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and many other nations – but too many of us can’t get in to see a GP.’

Unmet demand projections from [Commonwealth Government modelling](#) have estimated a current shortfall of GPs of over 2,400 FTE in 2024, increasing to around 3,900 FTE in 2028, and to over 8,900 FTE by 2048. Too few [are choosing to become or stay practicing as a GP](#).

‘Our system is under ever-increasing strain, unable to align service structures with demand or capacity to deliver universal access,’ continued Ms Woolcock.

‘In remote and rural Australia, where GP shortages have long been the norm, issues of access to primary care are biting harder than ever before, and now these gaps in access are also widening in our inner regional centres and the outer suburbs of our major cities.’

‘We rely on a health system that assumes you can see your GP when you need to, and certainly when you are sick.’

‘As the gatekeepers of our primary healthcare system, GP shortages can mean getting the care you need, where you need it and when you need it can be almost impossible.’

‘In general, you still need access to a GP to access subsidised services under Medicare. While bulk billing rates are being increased across all states and territories, and there are increasing numbers of Urgent Care Clinics, these services still rely on the same primary healthcare workforce plagued by shortages.’

‘While governments across the country recognise they need to work together so that people can experience health care as it should be – focused on their needs, the needs of their families and their communities – this report is just more evidence showing health reform is long overdue.’

‘The Commonwealth has committed to Strengthening Medicare, reviewing the incentives they provide to support GP practice and helping them to practise where they are needed. It is also reviewing how we can get the best from our entire highly-skilled health professional workforce, through the Scopes of Practice Review. And critically, National Cabinet has endorsed a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to be taken in the next National Health Reform Agreement, being worked on now.’

‘These developments are encouraging, but more importantly they are crucial and need to result in people having better access to timely and appropriate care.’

The online version of this [media release](#) can be found on the AHHA website. **The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.** Media enquiries: Kylie Woolcock, Chief Executive, AHHA, 0410 625 830



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'AHHA urges all Australian governments to prioritise a collaborative healthcare reform agenda to deliver care that is contemporary, fit for purpose and meets the needs and expectations of all Australians.'

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