

# Hawker Britton

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## ***Health Agenda Update***

**Occasional Paper**

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Hawker Britton Group Pty Ltd abn 79 109 681 405

tel +61 2 6295 8300 fax +61 2 6295 8400 Suite 2, 16 Bougainville Street MANUKA ACT 2603

Sydney | Canberra | Melbourne | Brisbane | Perth | Adelaide | Washington | Wellington

This paper outlines recent developments in areas such as:

- Mental Health
- Cancer-Fighting Measures
- Medicare Locals
- GP Super Clinics
- After Hours GP Helpline
- Telehealth
- Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records
- Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care
- Local Hospital Networks (LHNs)
- Preventative Health
- MyHospitals website
- Regional Health
- Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives Bill 2011
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

## Mental Health

As of 1 July 2011, a range of new Mental Health initiatives are in place, including:

- Medicare funding for consultations via video conference for patients to see their psychiatrist from home.
- Funding for double the number of psychological services provided by the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program.
- A range of suicide prevention measures as part of the *Taking Action to Tackle Suicide* package.
- Funding for 18,000 people with severe mental illness to access Dad to Day Living providers to increase community participation.
- Increased base level funding for the existing 30 *headspace* services to help boost their capacity.

Steps are also being taken towards the establishment of Australia's first National Mental Health Commission with the appointment of the CEO in June 2011. The core functions of the Commission will be to provide cross-sectoral leadership in mental health and drive transparency and accountability in the system to deliver better outcomes for consumers and carers. The Commission will also monitor the ongoing implementation of the 10 Year Roadmap for Mental Health Reform.

On 1 July 2011, Minister for Ageing and Mental Health the Hon. Mark Butler MP announced \$4 million of funding to establish a National Mental Health Consumer Organisation. The new organisation will be hosted by the Consumers Health Forum with a view to transitioning to a completely independent organisation after two years.

An expert advisory group is currently working on the establishment of the Government's e-mental health portal and online clinic, which was announced at the 2011-12 Budget in May 2011. These measures will make it easier for people with mental illness to access confidential information and services, including those having difficulty accessing face to face services, and those in rural and regional areas.

Negotiations have begun with state and territory Governments to implement the new \$200 million National Partnership on Mental Health Reform, which will fill service gaps within existing state mental health systems.

### **Cancer-fighting Measures**

The Government is investing more than \$2.2 billion for upgrades to Australia's cancer care centre system. In 2011-12, 22 Regional Cancer Centres are progressing around the country. From 1 July 2011, new cancer prevention measures will apply, including the continuation of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, and funding for the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia to develop resources and support services for men diagnosed with prostate cancer, especially in rural and regional areas. From 1 July 2011, funding is also being provided to enable Cancer Australia to provide information to women with gynaecological cancers, to promote evidence-based clinical best practice to professionals caring for women with these cancers, and to fund research.

### **Medicare Locals**

On 1 July 2011 under the NHHN, the Australian Government took full funding and policy responsibility for GP and primary health care services, including primary mental health care. In order to improve the coordination of health services the Government is establishing a national network of primary health care organisations called Medicare Locals. Medicare Locals are independent legal entities with formal links to Local Hospital Networks and build upon the existing role of the Divisions of general practice. By working across health services, Medicare Locals will help to identify and respond to gaps in local services and help patients and professionals navigate the health system more easily.

Medicare Locals work with local GPs and allied health and community health providers to drive local integration and coordination of services and improve access to care. The first 19 Medicare Locals commenced operations on 1 July 2011, with the remainder set to commence in mid 2012.

On 29 October 2010, the Government released a discussion paper on the planned roles, functions and governance of Medicare Locals. The Medicare Locals Discussion Paper is available at [http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourHealth/publishing.nsf/Content/MedicareLocalsDiscussionPaper/\\$FILE/Discussion%20Paper.pdf](http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourHealth/publishing.nsf/Content/MedicareLocalsDiscussionPaper/$FILE/Discussion%20Paper.pdf). The paper outlines what activities Medicare Locals will undertake, how they will be structured, and how they will engage with patients and health providers.

In February 2011, the Government re-examined the Medicare Local catchments which had been proposed on 23 December 2010. The final boundaries have now been announced, totalling 62 Medicare Locals nationwide. Further information and maps detailing the boundaries are available at [http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/MediLocBound\\_Review](http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/MediLocBound_Review).

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is now inviting applications for the establishment of Medicare Locals across Australia in 2012. The next group of Medicare Locals will build on the expertise and capacity of existing primary care organisations, particularly Divisions of General Practice as well as other primary health care organisations and service providers.

Organisations wishing to apply for Medicare Locals commencing operations in 2012 must submit applications to the Department of Health and Ageing Tender Box by 2pm AEST on **19 July 2011**. The guidelines for applicants are available at [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/grantITA2491011/\\$FILE/Medicare%20Locals%20Guidelines%20and%20Information%20for%20applicants.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/grantITA2491011/$FILE/Medicare%20Locals%20Guidelines%20and%20Information%20for%20applicants.pdf).

## GP Super Clinics

GP Super Clinics are a key element of the Australian Government's strategy to build a stronger primary health care system by providing a range of health services to the public in the one location. GP Super Clinics have been announced in 36 locations across Australia. For details of locations, go to <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/pacd-gpsuperclinics-location>.

During the 2010 election the Government committed to establishing new GP Super Clinics in Geelong, Canberra, the Southern Central Coast, the Northern Beaches and Northam. The Government is progressing a number of GP super clinic proposals through direct invitation.

Further information is available at <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/Health-reform-and-better-quality-primary-health-care>.

## After Hours GP Helpline

On 1 July 2011, a new After Hours GP Helpline began operations for people living in the ACT, NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania and WA. Queenslanders will also be able to use the service from early 2012.

The After Hours GP Helpline is intended for people whose health condition cannot wait for treatment until regular general practice services are next available, cannot see their usual GP out of hours, do not know where to access after hours care or are not sure what they should do. Depending on their condition, the caller may be provided with self-care advice by the telephone-based nurse or GP, or may be referred to the most appropriate health services in their local area.

## Telehealth

Telehealth is a new service which provides patients with easier access to specialists, without the time and expense involved in travelling to major cities. As of 1 July 2011, patients in remote, regional, and outer metropolitan areas, and in aged care facilities and eligible Aboriginal Medical Services throughout Australia can access Medicare and DVA rebates for telehealth services. These patients face greater barriers to accessing specialist services than those in city areas. Telehealth helps patients to overcome these barriers; accessing specialist services sooner with lower travel costs, and better continuity of care. Further information about Telehealth can be found at <http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/telehealth>.

## Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records (PCEHR)

The PCEHR system is a key element of the Australian Government's national health reform agenda. The development and testing of e-health infrastructure and standards in real world settings is currently being undertaken in 12 sites around the country.

The PCEHR draft Concept of Operations paper is available at <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/content/pcehr>. Submissions closed in June 2011 and the final Concept of Operations document is scheduled for release in August.

The PCEHR System: Legislation Issues Paper Fact Sheet was released on 7 July 2011 and is available at <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/pcehrlegals-factsheet>. Submissions are invited by 3 August 2011.

## Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care

One of the key parts of the NHHN Agreement is the establishment of the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) as a permanent, independent statutory authority. The Commission is an important element in the NHHN strategy, functioning as a leader and coordinator of improvements to safety and quality in health care.

Further information about the *National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2011* is available at <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22legislation%2Fbillhome%2Fr4433%22>.

## Local Hospital Networks (LHNs)

Local Hospital Networks are being implemented in order to devolve operational management of public hospitals to the local level. Local Hospital Networks will mean Australians will benefit from access to better coordinated health care and more efficient use of resources and will find it easier to navigate between service providers and health services. New South Wales has agreed to 18 LHNs and the

boundaries for all other states have been agreed with the exception of Victoria and Western Australia. All LHNs are expected to be in operation by July 2012.

## Preventative Health

Under national health reform, the Australian Government is investing \$56 million in preventive health measures, building on the \$872 million COAG National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health. This investment will tackle the rise of chronic and preventable conditions through a range of initiatives, including:

- the establishment of the Australian National Preventive Health Agency, which began operations on 1 January 2011;
- the Australian Health Survey, which commenced in March 2011;
- a range of preventative health campaigns, including the National Tobacco Campaign, the complementary Targeted Approach and National Indigenous Tobacco Campaigns, the Live Longer Campaign, and the Swap It Campaign;
- funding through the Healthy Workers and Healthy Children programs, which commenced in July 2011, to support healthy living programs in workplaces and to increase levels of activity and intakes of fruit and vegetables in child care centres and schools;
- funding through the Healthy Communities Grants program for local governments to offer innovative healthy lifestyle programs and activities that have a focus on supporting adults not in the paid workforce.

The Government is continuing to pursue Tobacco Plain Packaging Legislation. On 6 July 2011, the Minister for Health and Ageing introduced the *Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill 2011* and the associated *Trade Marks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Bill 2011* into Parliament.

### **National Preventative Health Agency**

The National Preventative Health Agency will support Australian governments to address the increasingly complex challenges associated with preventing chronic disease.

The ANPHA was established under the auspices of the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (the Prevention NP), a COAG initiative announced in November 2008. Through the Prevention NP, the Commonwealth Government is providing \$872.1 million over six years for a range of initiatives targeting the lifestyle risk factors of chronic disease, including:

- settings-based interventions in pre-schools, schools, workplaces and communities to support behavioural changes in the social contexts of everyday lives, and focusing on poor nutrition, physical inactivity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption (including binge drinking);
- social marketing aimed at obesity and tobacco; and

- the enabling infrastructure to monitor and evaluate progress made by these interventions, including the ANPHA.

On 7 July 2011, Lisa Studdert was appointed Acting Chief Executive Officer of the ANPHA. More information about the agency is available at its website at <http://www.anpha.gov.au>.

## MyHospitals Website

The Government's MyHospitals website ([www.MyHospitals.gov.au](http://www.MyHospitals.gov.au)) was launched in December 2010 with information about public hospitals in all states and territories— including Western Australia.

MyHospitals compares hospital performance with key national benchmarks, such as national average waiting times for elective surgery and emergency department care. The website also lists the medical services provided, bed numbers and data for outpatient services if such services are provided.

*"We want to shine a light on hospitals to make it easier for all Australians to access important information about the services and performance of their local hospital."*<sup>1</sup>

- Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon MP, 10 December 2010

## Regional Health

The 'Regional Health Package' negotiated between the Government and the Independents following the 2010 election committed \$9.9 billion to a package focussed on regional infrastructure, health and hospitals and education.

The package included \$1.8 billion towards a Regional Priority Round of the Health and Hospitals Fund for hospitals in regional Australia and in Tasmania only. Projects funded are listed at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr11-nr-nr090.htm?OpenDocument&yr=2011&mth=05>. Another Regional Priority Round with \$475 million of funding was announced in the 2011 Budget. Applications will open later in 2011.

## Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives Bill 2011

On 7 July 2011 the Government reintroduced legislation to the Parliament to reform the Private Health Insurance rebate. Under the proposed legislation, new income thresholds or 'tiers' at which different rebate amounts would apply would be introduced from January 2012.

<sup>1</sup> Minister for Health and Ageing Media Release, 10 December 2010, available online at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr10-nr-nr204.htm>.

## Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

The Government has reformed PBS pricing arrangements for medicines that are subject to competition in the market place. The *National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010* amends the *National Health Act 1953* (the Act) and provides for the following:

- On 1 February 2011, a two per cent statutory price reduction was applied to all drugs listed on F2A as at 11 October 2010;
- On 1 February 2011, a five per cent reduction was applied to all drugs listed on F2T as at 11 October 2010. Drugs that were allowed staged 25 per cent reductions, and any related brands, had this five per cent reduction applied as if the full 25 per cent price reduction had already been applied; and
- On 1 February 2011, an increase from 12.5 per cent to 16 per cent for the price reductions under the Act which apply when the first bioequivalent brand of a pharmaceutical item becomes available on the PBS (or the 12.5% reduction has not been taken previously).

These reforms were designed not to have any price impacts for consumers.

## Conclusion

The Gillard Labor Government has made significant progress in delivering its health reform agenda, laying out its plans for policy implementation and driving supporting legislation through the Parliament.

The underlying framework for reform is the [National Health and Hospitals Network \(NHHN\) Agreement](#) made between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments in April 2010 and finalised on 2 August 2011. This agreement underpins the historic reform to hospitals funding, and facilitates a number of other reform initiatives such as Medicare Locals. Further details about the COAG agreement are available at <http://www.hawkerbritton.com/hawker-britton-media/federal-act/344/coag-health-agreement.htm>.

The Government has released an important implementation document, [A National Health and Hospitals Network for Australia's Future – Delivering the Reforms](#), outlining the extensive implementation plan including key timelines and milestones.

The Government is taking practical measures to implement reform in key areas of preventative health and primary health care with the aim of improving access to and quality of care, supporting the health workforce, and strengthening coordinated governance.