



Australian Health Ministers' Conference

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Australian Health Ministers met in Canberra today, with elective surgery, patient rights and the new Australian Health Care Agreements some of the main areas of discussion.

Elective Surgery

Already, in just six months, almost 14,000 additional patients have received elective surgery as a result of the partnership between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.

Earlier this year, the Rudd Government committed \$150 million for an immediate blitz to undertake 25,000 additional procedures for people waiting longer than clinically recommended. In return, the States have used this funding effectively, and agreed to a comprehensive reporting regime.

55% of that target has now been met – and States and Territories expect to meet the target by the end of 2008.

This is a strong sign of what can be achieved when governments work together. It is a direct benefit of the collective determination to end the blame game, and build a stronger health system.

Monitoring growth in demand

The Ministers also discussed funding under the new Australian Health Care Agreements. It was agreed that as part of the negotiations, all factors driving growth in demand for public health services would be considered. There was general agreement that, due to the complex factors driving growth in public hospitals, work would have to be done to determine the most effective way to monitor this growth. Work also needs to be done on ways to manage any growth in demand.

Improving Quality Care

- **Charter of Patient Rights**

Ministers agreed that a single Charter will be identified as a clear statement of a minimum set of standards of rights, expectations and entitlements that is uniformly applicable across all states and territories. This will facilitate a more cohesive and unified approach to achieving health rights for patients and consumers across Australia.

The Ministers acknowledged the work done by the late Dr Christopher Newell in developing the Charter.

- **Hospital patient ID bands**

The Ministers agreed to adopt a standard patient identification band by public and private health services. Previously, different colours have been used as codes for different conditions, but there is some evidence that these can increase the risk of identification errors. A national standard will improve patient safety and quality of care.

- **Standards in Cosmetic Surgery**

Standards in cosmetic surgery are a new and emerging issue. Health Ministers expressed concern about a lack of consistent standards in the industry. Ministers agreed to further investigate stronger regulation of the industry to provide greater patient protection.

- **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare performance indicators**

Ministers agreed on the importance of working cooperatively towards a strong national system of health service accountability. Ministers agreed that this work was crucial to inform the new Australian Health Care Agreement.

- **Mental Health**

The Ministers agreed to the development of the Fourth National Mental Health Plan. They agreed to further consultation with experts from the mental health sector, before a forum is held in NSW at the end of August 2008, bringing together stakeholders and experts for a broad discussion of reform in the sector.

The next meeting will be in Brisbane on 28 November 2008.

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