

Australia's Health

GAP/ACHR Congress • 30 November 2009

Australia's health system consistently ranks among the top ten of the world's developed countries¹. Our healthcare industry continues to grow, with technological advancements providing many changes and new opportunities for improved services. Yet, since its development in the 1970s, the structure of the national health system has never been substantially modified. The demographics of an ageing population, the increasing burden of chronic illnesses, skills shortages in the health workforce supply and escalating costs of new medical technologies are just some of the challenges facing our health system today which warrant new thinking and innovative solutions.

The commitment to national health reform was a centerpiece of the November 2007 and March 2008 meetings of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). In June 2008, the Victorian Government released a paper² outlining a comprehensive reform proposal, with a ten-point plan focusing on patients and their needs, disease prevention and more flexible and sustainable resourcing. The process of developing reform options was led by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission which presented its findings and recommendations to the Government in July 2009.

In support of these recent developments in national health reform, Global Access Partners (GAP) and the Australian Centre for Health Research (ACHR), in association with a number of government and industry sponsors, will co-host a high level debate to review major aspects of proposed and possible reforms and improvements required for the health system to effectively meet the future needs of the Australian population.

The Congress on Australia's Health, to be held on 30 November 2009 in the Legislative Assembly Chamber of Parliament House of Victoria in Melbourne, will address the following issues:

- ▶ Role of governments as funders, service providers and buyers of healthcare products and services
- ▶ Relevance of performance across the sector; improving choice for patients
- ▶ Private health insurance as an active player in the health care marketplace
- ▶ Minimisation of costs associated with health care reform
- ▶ The need for a national health data system accessible to general practitioners, allied health care providers and bureaucracies
- ▶ Management of public hospitals
- ▶ Management and funding of the aged care sector
- ▶ Creation of a more self-sufficient and flexible medical workforce

This Congress will bring representatives from State and Federal government together with key figures from research, industry and commerce sectors, hospitals, insurers, pharmaceutical companies, area and district health services, and consumer groups. In the true spirit of the GAP Congress model – an open, informed and constructive debate in a parliamentary setting combined with unique networking opportunities – it will operate as a high level multidisciplinary think tank. Each participant will be able to put forward their ideas, share their experiences and explore innovative approaches.

Post-Congress, a Report will be tabled summarising the conclusions and recommendations of the Congress, which will be offered for subsequent consideration by the Australian Government. The Report will also form a blueprint for the Australian National Consultative Committee on e-Health towards developing outcomes and building a platform for co-operation with government and business.

¹ Australia's Health 2006, The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

² Next Steps in Australian Health Reform, Victorian Government, 24 June 2008



History of GAP's health reform initiative www.globalaccesspartners.org

GAP's initiatives in the area of health and wellbeing over the last five years have ranged from discussions of national health policy to the problems of implementing an Australia-wide e-health infrastructure and the potential applications of genetic testing in drug therapy to the management and long term funding of chronic "lifestyle" diseases in an ageing Australian population.

In 2005, GAP facilitated the formation of the *Australian National Consultative Committee on e-Health* - a powerful group of business and government executives and academics which aims to explore, define and promote better patient health outcomes through the application of information technology. Some of the Committee's major projects were presented at the GAP Congress on *Wellness & Ageing*, held in Melbourne in Parliament House of Victoria in 2007.

Among the most notable initiatives of GAP in 2007-2008 have been a workshop "*Implementing a Rational e-Health System in Australia*" (in association with ACHR), breakfast seminars on the potential benefits of drug-specific genetic tests in individual therapy, a health information exchange project and the development of new, technology driven approaches to support evidence based medical practice.

Australian Centre for Health Research www.achr.com.au

ACHR was established in 2005 to represent views of the many and varied elements that comprise public and private sector health in Australia. The Centre's key objectives are to initiate and promote public discussion among all stakeholders, fund research projects, test research outcomes through workshops and seminars, develop programs for desirable health reform and present these to government.

Over the last three years, the Centre funded a number of nationally significant research projects, including "*e-health and the transformation of healthcare*" (Prof M. Georgeff), "*Examination of the Australian Healthcare Agreements*" (TFG International), "*Medicare Choice - lessons for Australia from the reforms of health insurance in the Netherlands*" (Prof J. Stoelwinder) and "*Improving the Quality Use of Medicines in Australia: Realising the Potential of Pharmacogenomics*" (by Deloitte Economics, in association with the National Pharmacogenomics Consultative Group facilitated by GAP).