



Australian Health Ministers' Conference

COMMUNIQUE

13 November 2009

National Breastfeeding Strategy endorsed and more progress on e-health and elective surgery

Health Ministers today met in Adelaide to discuss a range of issues including e-health, improving elective surgery performance, and strengthening accountability and performance reporting in the health system. The meeting was chaired by South Australian Health Minister, John Hill.

Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy endorsed

Health Ministers today endorsed the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2010-2015*. The Strategy recognises the biological, health, social, cultural, environmental and economic importance of breastfeeding and provides a framework for priorities and action for Australian governments at all levels to protect, promote, support and monitor breastfeeding throughout Australia. Development of the Strategy was led by the Commonwealth Government in consultation with States and Territories and key stakeholders.

Australia's dietary guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding of infants until six months of age, with the introduction of solid foods at around six months and continued breastfeeding until the age of 12 months - and beyond if both mother and infant wish. It is concerning that a longitudinal study of Australian children conducted in 2004 found that while 92 per cent of new borns were initially breastfed, by one week, only 80 per cent were fully breastfed. The study also indicated a steady decline each month with only 56 per cent fully breastfed at three months and 14 per cent at six months.

The Strategy provides a platform for future action by governments working in partnership with the community to turn this around.

The implementation of the Strategy will be progressed by governments both independently and nationally under the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, and with ongoing leadership from the Commonwealth. The Strategy will be publicly released before the end of 2009.

WHO Surgical Safety checklist endorsed

Ministers supported the WHO Surgical Safety checklist as a nationally agreed strategy for surgical safety in Australia.

Last year the WHO published guidelines identifying multiple recommended practices to ensure the safety of surgical patients worldwide. In Australia the Royal

Australasian College of Surgeons adapted the Checklist for Australian purposes and today Ministers gave their strong support for the national implementation of the Surgical Safety Checklist as proposed by professional organisations and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

It was agreed that a locally adapted and agreed format of the Checklist be implemented across all jurisdictions by July 2011.

National e-health system one step closer

Health Ministers today affirmed their commitment to the introduction in 2010 of national healthcare identifier numbers and agreed to release for further consultation draft legislation for establishing the healthcare identifiers.

Ministers considered feedback from the first phase of public consultations held in July-August 2009. Following these consultations and feedback, further work has been done on the identifiers to clarify and strengthen patient privacy. Ministers have now agreed:

- the legislative framework will limit the use of healthcare identifiers to health information management and communication purposes as part of delivering a healthcare service;
- healthcare identifiers will be underpinned by effective national privacy arrangements, protecting health information wherever it is associated with healthcare identifiers, regardless of whether the information is held by a public or private organisation;
- the Healthcare Identifiers Service (HI Service) will have an appropriate governance framework with transparent and accountable processes;
- penalties will apply to the misuse of healthcare identifiers; and
- to review the implementation of the healthcare identifiers after a period of two years.

Healthcare Identifiers are unique numbers that will be given to all healthcare providers, healthcare organisations and healthcare consumers. These unique numbers will provide a new level of confidence when communicating patient information between the myriad of private and government healthcare providers and systems. The identifiers are an important building block for the eventual introduction of a patient controlled Individual Electronic Health Record.

The legislation to establish the Healthcare Identifiers will be introduced to the Federal Parliament in the Autumn 2010 sittings.

Elective surgery

Ministers also released new elective surgery performance data, which show more Australians are receiving elective surgery procedures thanks to the sustained efforts of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments under the Commonwealth's \$600 million Elective Surgery Waiting List Plan.

The June quarterly data shows there were 21,811 extra procedures carried out in the first six months on 2009 compared to the same six month period in 2007. For the same period in 2008 there were 15,510 extra procedures compared to 2007.

The report shows that elective surgery admissions were higher than in the previous two quarters. Most states and territories have decreased the number of patients on the overdue and long-wait lists and have managed to sustain and improve capacity and performance thanks to funding provided by the Rudd Government.

Since the Commonwealth investment commenced in 2008, an additional 62,000 elective surgery procedures have been undertaken and the number of people waiting longer than clinically recommended has been reduced by 13,000.

Ministers also discussed the impact and increased activity caused by H1N1 Influenza over the winter months, and its affect on elective surgery throughput, which will likely be reflected in the September quarter figures.

Framework for Perinatal Initiative agreed

Australian health ministers today agreed to the Framework for the National Perinatal Depression Initiative 2008-09 to 2012-13.

Through the Initiative, Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are making a significant financial commitment to improving outcomes for women with perinatal depression. The Framework provides a policy basis for the Initiative. It outlines how all Governments will improve the prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression and provide better care, support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing perinatal depression.

Key elements of the framework are:

- routine and universal screening for perinatal depression using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression scale;
- follow up support and care for women assessed as being at risk of or experiencing perinatal depression;
- workforce training and development for health professionals; and
- community awareness.

Following agreement today of the National Framework, the Australian and State and Territory Governments will now work towards progressing the Initiative as set out in the Framework

Fourth National Mental Health Plan commitment

The Australian Health Ministers' Conference today reaffirmed its commitment to improving the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians, recognising that one in five Australians continue to experience a mental illness in a given year.

Today health ministers publicly released the *Fourth National Mental Health Plan: an agenda for collaborative government action in mental health 2009-2014*.

The Plan has five priority areas for government action in mental health:

1. Social inclusion and recovery;
2. Prevention and early intervention;
3. Service access, coordination and continuity of care;
4. Quality improvement and innovation; and
5. Accountability - measuring and reporting progress.

While led by health ministers, the Plan takes a whole of government approach. This approach acknowledges that the best mental health outcomes are achieved through a partnership involving sectors other than just health.

The Plan is ambitious in its approach and for the first time includes a robust accountability framework. Each year, governments will report progress on implementation of the Plan to the Council of Australian Governments

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