



The Blame Game:

Report on the inquiry into health funding

Wide-ranging health funding reforms on issues such as a national health agenda, training and dental care are proposed in a new report released today (4 December 2006) by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing.

The Committee's report, ***The blame game: Report on the inquiry into health funding***, makes a total of 29 recommendations. Chair of the Committee, Alex Somlyay, said that "while Australian health care is often better reported as being better than similar overseas countries, the community is getting sick of blame shifting between governments about the inadequacies of Australia's health system".

"Addressing the blame game will involve a national approach to developing and funding health care. This will require leadership from the Australian Government, cooperation by the states and a joint commitment to end the blame game", Mr Somlyay said. "An ageing population, health workforce shortages, the rate of development of new health technologies and rising community expectations mean that ongoing reform is needed."

The Committee looked at a number of different funding models to address deficiencies of current arrangements including cost shifting and duplication, lack of coordination, treating 'illness' rather than promoting 'wellness' and concerns about the safety and quality of care.

The Committee's 29 recommendations include a need for:

- leadership by the Australian Government to develop a national health agenda, in consultation with the states and territories.
- supplementary Australian Government funding for public dental services so that reasonable access standards for appropriate services are maintained, particularly for disadvantaged groups.
- developing a purchasing agreement for clinical health workforce training with the states and territories and the private sector.

The Committee has also proposed changes to public hospital funding arrangements when the Australian Health Care Agreements expire in June 2008. The proposals aim to remove barriers to health reform, more closely link funding with national health policy standards and improve accountability for the quality and safety of health care.

"The Australian Government has undertaken significant reforms since the inquiry commenced in March 2005, particularly in making private health insurance more attractive and boosting access to primary health services," Mr Somlyay said.

The Committee received 159 submissions and spoke to over 100 individuals and organisations at 18 public hearings around the country.

For media interview with the Chairman:

Please contact Mr Somlyay's office on (02) 6277 8552.

For a copy of the report and further information on the inquiry: Contact the Committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4145 or email haa.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa/healthfunding/index.htm>