



The Allied Health professions are critical to Australian health services, and must be given equal standing to doctors and nurses in all aspects of health and hospital reform.

There are more than 116,000 allied health professionals (AHPs) working in Australia today. They make up nearly 20% of the health workforce – almost twice as many as the medical profession (10%), but not as many as nurses (35%).

Allied health professionals play a critical role in the nation's hospitals, in primary care, in preventative health care, chronic disease management, mental health, palliative care and community and aged care services. Working collaboratively with doctors and nurses, allied health clinicians are the crucial 'third pillar' of Australia's health and hospital services.

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) believes that the Federal Government's health and hospital reform package does not give enough recognition to the role of allied health professionals, in terms of the management and governance of critical structures, notably the Primary Health Care Organisations - somewhat misleadingly called 'Medicare Locals' – and the Local Hospital Networks.

Although government policies in recent years have given greater recognition to the critical importance of allied health, particularly in terms of multi-disciplinary care, recent decisions appear to be a 'throw-back' to the days when doctors were seen as the sole gate-keepers and custodians of Australian health services. There has been very little support for consumers to access the services of allied health in the government's reform package to date.

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) is concerned that allied health services are still widely viewed as peripheral rather than integral to good health outcomes, especially for people with chronic and complex conditions such as diabetes. Allied health professionals diagnose and treat a range of conditions, often in multi-disciplinary teams. They are critical to the management and prevention of diabetes and obesity, two of the major challenges facing Australia's health services. Greater access to allied health services for all Australians would strengthen preventative as well as remedial health care, and so assist in limiting health costs in the longer term.

While the Federal Government's health reform package marks an important step in making the Australian health system more responsive and resilient to the growing health demands and escalating costs of health care delivery, the package needs to take more cognisance of allied health professionals, as well as consumers.

The health of the community would be enhanced if people could access affordable allied healthcare services when they most need them and where they most need them. The right healthcare professional providing the most appropriate, affordable and timely services across remote, rural, regional and metropolitan Australia should be a top priority in any health policy.

Without representative governance structures, underpinned by robust constitutional frameworks, the new structures will not be able to adequately address the key issue of equity of access to services and providers other than GP services.

About AHPA

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) is the national peak body for major health professions and their representative bodies other than medical practitioners, nurses and unions. AHPA works to represent the interests of the allied health professions sector, particularly to the Federal Government; and to provide a vehicle for liaison and discussion between the professions themselves.

Members of AHPA include associations of the following professions:

- Audiologists
- Chiropractors
- Diabetes educators
- Dietitians
- Exercise physiologists
- Occupational therapists
- Orthoptists
- Orthotists and prothetists
- Osteopaths
- Pharmacists
- Podiatrists
- Psychologists
- Radiographers and radiation scientists
- Social workers
- Sonographers
- Speech pathologists
- Allied health in rural and remote Australia