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AMA report confirms staggering undersupply of GPs in next two decades

New analysis from the Australian Medical Association has confirmed, after years of Government neglect, Australia is facing a shortage of more than 10,600 GPs by 2031, with the supply of GPs not keeping pace with growing community demand.

The AMA’s new report found demand for GP services increased by 58 per cent between 2009 and 2019.

The report, ‘[The general practice workforce: why the neglect must end](#)’, is a detailed examination of the scale and causes of the GP workforce shortfall and proposes solutions, as part of the [AMA’s Plan to Modernise Medicare](#) campaign.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the AMA’s projections showed no let-up in future demand for GP care.

“We are staring at this unimaginable shortage of GPs in our future and our projections show these pressures are just not going to ease up.

“We simply should not be in this position, but it’s clear the short-sighted policies of successive Commonwealth governments have failed the community.

“It should come as no surprise that we’re failing to fill all our available GP training places each year given the impact of the extended freeze on Medicare rebates for GP services, cuts to pre-vocational GP training places and the abject failure of governments to deliver the support general practice needs to deal with the increasingly complex health care needs of the community.

“The Commonwealth has talked about the value of general practice but has not backed this rhetoric with concrete action. Instead, we are seeing knee jerk reactions, including from state governments, that undermine the role of a patient’s usual GP, fragment care and do nothing to address the systemic issues we have.

“We need long-term solutions to improve access to GP led care for patients, including in rural and remote areas that have been hardest hit by workforce shortages. Right now, we need all levels of government to work together with the health sector to resolve the GP workforce issues. These state-based quick fixes are not the answer.

“Our report shows the most cost-effective method, with the best outcomes for patients, is GP-led primary care. We want to work together with pharmacists, psychologists, and other allied health as part of a collaborative team for every patient,” Professor Robson said.

“The GPs we have now, who have shouldered the load in the pandemic, are doing the best they can, but can’t hope to hold back the on-coming wave of demand.

“We are about to hit the peak of the 4th COVID-19 wave as we try to address two years of backlog created by the pandemic. Our GPs are at the frontline of care and need to be properly supported to provide the care Australians desperately need,” Professor Robson said.

Main findings in *The general practice workforce: why the neglect must end*

- Between 2009 and 2019 demand for GP services increased by 4.7 per cent annually (a total growth of 58 per cent) which is equivalent to the workload of 10,200 full time GPs. In the past five years, 2016–2021 the workforce added an equivalent of only 4,200 full time GPs, which suggests that GPs have worked under increased pressure to keep up with the demand and are now at breaking point.
- The demand will continue to grow, and even factoring in the future workforce, there will be a projected shortfall of over 10,600 full time GPs by 2031–32 if strategies are not put in place to attract and retain the GP workforce.
- Demand for GP services is driven by population growth (1.6 per cent), ageing (0.2 per cent), more frequent visits by patients to their GPs (1.7 per cent growth) and spending more time with the GP at each consult (1.2 per cent growth).
- A Western Australian study found that for every full-time GP, Australia needs to train two extra GPs to cover the changing patterns of the workforce.
- The prevalence of chronic conditions in Australia cannot be understated. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that almost half (47 per cent or more than 11 million people) of Australians have at least one chronic condition, and one in five (20 per cent or 4.9 million people) have multiple chronic conditions.
- Studies consistently show continuity of care with the same GP reduces ED presentations. An Australian study showed regular GP care reduces high repeat-use hospitalisations by up to 11 per cent.

For more information visit: https://www.ama.com.au/articles/general-practitioner-workforce-why-neglect-must-end?check_logged_in=1

Read the report: https://www.ama.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/AMA-Research-and-Reform-General-practitioner-workforce-why-the-neglect-must-end-final_1.pdf

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