



Health Ministers Meeting (HMM): *Communique* **10 November 2023**

Health Ministers from all Australian governments met in Perth on 10 November 2023 to discuss a range of important issues for Australia's healthcare system. These include:

Health workforce reforms

Health Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to national health workforce reform. The Independent review of health practitioner regulatory settings commissioned by National Cabinet was tabled in August 2023, with several recommendations to urgently improve registration pathways for international health practitioners. Ministers have agreed to support all recommendations.

Ministers also received the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman's review into specialist medical colleges training site accreditation processes. Ministers support the recommendations, and note that the report is published here [<https://www.nhpo.gov.au/accreditation-processes-review>]. The Report's findings will inform the ongoing work by Health Workforce Taskforce and the Australian Medical Council to improve accreditation processes nationally. Ministers were pleased to hear that the AMC had commenced implementation of the recommendations. Ministers will continue to be briefed on progress.

Health Ministers agreed to the need for legislative reform in response to allegations of professional misconduct including sexual misconduct by health practitioners. Consultation with the sector will continue to ensure responses are appropriate and to ensure ongoing patient safety and the highest standard of care.

NHRA Mid-Term Review – Final Report

Health Ministers discussed the progress of National Health Reform Agreement Mid-Term Review – Final Report and noted that it would be progressed to the next National Cabinet meeting for consideration.

Women's Access to Reproductive Health

Health Ministers welcomed Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care Ged Kearney who provided an update on women's health and access to reproductive health. In May 2023 the final report and recommendations of the Senate inquiry into universal access to reproductive healthcare were tabled. Assistant Minister Kearney outlined the recommendations which have been accepted by the Commonwealth Government, and all Ministers gave in-principle support to the recommendations and committed to working together to deliver those for which there are joint responsibilities.

Expansion of the National Bloodspot Screening Program

Ministers agreed on the Newborn Bloodspot Screening decision-making pathways and priority actions. Ministers agreed to consider adding more conditions to the screening program, and that States and Territories will work with the Commonwealth to ensure the program is sustainable.

First Nations Health priorities

Health Ministers remain committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, leaders and peak bodies to Close the Gap. Health Ministers resolved to again meet with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and agreed to work with the sector to bring forward the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable to the first half of 2024. A key focus will be to progress initiatives and priorities that will close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians' health and life expectancy outcomes.

Australian Centre for Disease Control

Health Ministers are committed to supporting the establishment of the Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC). The Australian CDC will help prevent and control communicable diseases, protect Australia in the face of a range of emergencies with a health impact, and drive and deliver better health outcomes for all Australians. Ministers endorsed a shared Statement of Intent, which is attached to this communique.

Several other items were considered by Health Ministers, including:

- Vaping control – Health Ministers received a progress update from Minister Butler on the national vaping response in Australia. Health Ministers look forward to meeting with Police Ministers later in November to discuss enforcement of the vaping reforms.
- Audiology – Ministers agreed to develop a national consensus statement on the minimum standard for the frequency of mapping cochlear implants in children in the first 12 months post cochlear implantation.
- COVID-19 – Ministers noted that the COVID-19 Response Inquiry is now open to public submissions.
- Palliative Care and the NDIS – Health Ministers noted it is essential that people who are terminally ill have access to care and supports which are suited to their health needs and agreed to write to the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Honourable Bill Shorten MP, to clarify the position.
- Private practicing midwives – Health Ministers agreed to extend the exemption to hold professional indemnity insurance for privately practising midwives providing homebirth services until 1 July 2025.

Prior to the HMM on 10 November, Health Ministers also noted, out-of-session, the four priority strategies of the National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032. These are:

- Make processed food and drinks healthier (Strategy 1. 4)
- Improve nutrition information to help consumers make healthier choices at the time of purchase (Strategy 1. 5)

- Reduce exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing, promotion and sponsorship especially for children (Strategy 1. 6)
- Improve uptake of integrated models of care and referral pathways that focus on the individual (Strategy 3. 2)

Health Ministers noted the considerable action already underway aligned, with these priority strategies.