



Pathways to sustainable and effective primary health care

APNA 2013 Federal Election Platform

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APNA's 2013 Federal Election Platform

The nursing workforce is the backbone of the healthcare system. Ensuring an adequate, well-trained and well supported nursing workforce is key to meeting the rapidly increasing healthcare needs of an ageing Australian population with an increasing burden of chronic disease. A great deal of this burden of disease will need to be dealt with at primary health care level, and nurses are a critical component of the general practice and primary health care workforce.

APNA's election platform aims to improve health outcomes for Australians by ensuring a robust primary health care sector, underpinned by a sustainable primary health care nursing workforce that is engaged, prepared and supported to meet the health needs of the community.

APNA calls on all parties and candidates in the 2013 Federal Election campaign to commit to the following vital measures:

- Significantly increased investment of resources into primary health care systems in Australia.
- The development of an education and career framework for nurses working in primary health care, particularly general practice.
- Reforms to general practice financing, to support equitable access to quality multidisciplinary team care.
- Engagement with all relevant health professions and consumers on primary health care reform.

Further detail on each of these priorities is outlined below.

1 Build the capacity of the primary health care sector to meet the health needs of all Australians, now and into the future.

A robust primary health care system is essential to meeting the growing needs of our ageing population by keeping people as well as possible, and able to live in the community for as long as possible. Investment in the primary health care system will help ensure the physical and mental health needs of the community can be met in the most efficient and person-centred way, supporting Australians to live and age well.

High quality primary health care, effectively integrated with care provided from other sectors, can help older Australians live longer in their homes and communities, and enable early intervention, health promotion, and effective self-management to address the burden of chronic disease in our community. This will significantly ease pressure on hospitals and the residential aged care sector, and improve access and equity for the person receiving care.

APNA calls for significantly increased investment of resources into primary health care systems in Australia. These resources should be allocated to improved financing for direct patient care, so that general practice and primary health care remains sustainable and vibrant, and out of pocket costs are minimised, particularly for the most disadvantaged; to the development of effective primary health care

organisations to maximise coordination and integration at regional level; and to workforce development across the multidisciplinary primary health care team, to ensure sustainable high quality care into the future.

2 Support the development of an education and career framework for nurses in primary health care, particularly those working in general practice.

Nurses are a substantial component of the primary health care workforce, and make an increasingly important contribution to primary health care in Australia. Primary health care nurses play a major role in improving health outcomes through their role in delivering quality chronic disease management, immunisation services, and other preventative care, as well as curative care, care for the ageing, dealing with issues such as medicines safety, and implementing improvements in primary health care systems.

The majority of general practices in Australia employ at least one nurse, and the number of practice nurses is increasing substantially every year. In addition, nurses make an important contribution across a number of other primary health care settings, such as community health services, schools, workplace health, prisons and many other settings. Yet there are major risks to the capacity of this workforce going forward. Health Workforce Australia's report *Health Workforce 2025* predicts a shortage of almost 110,000 nurses in Australia by 2025, and identifies this as a critical risk for the Australian healthcare system.

The nursing shortage will without doubt impact on general practice and primary health care. Already, more than four in five nurses working in general practice are aged over 40, with the largest cohort being in their fifties. Yet there are currently no formal pathways through nurse education and training into general practice and primary health care; no career structure for nurses working in general practice and primary health care; and no national workforce plan for general practice nursing.

There is a critical need for a plan to improve recruitment, retention and productivity in the primary health care nursing workforce. Such a plan would deal with current problems including the lack of supported clinical placements in primary care in the context of bottlenecks for new nursing graduates seeking placements; the barriers to re-entry for trained nurses who have been out of the workforce for a period; and the high level of exits from primary care nursing due to the lack of career development opportunities.

APNA calls for the development of an education and career framework for nurses working in the primary care sector, particularly general practice settings. This pathway would:

- Include a formal system to support undergraduate and postgraduate clinical placements in primary health care settings, to encourage recruitment into the sector, thereby harnessing the wealth of knowledge and skills of the current nursing workforce to educate, preceptor and mentor the much needed new generation of primary health care nurses.

- Establish a career structure which ensures nurses working in primary health care can and are encouraged to increase their education and training, skills, and scope of practice throughout their careers, supporting retention and productivity. The career structure needs to encompass entry level roles through to advanced practice/nurse practitioner roles.

3 Improve the financing of general practice, to support equitable access to quality multidisciplinary team care.

The primary health care financing system must be reformed to adequately support and promote high quality, person-centred multidisciplinary team care, and ensure good access for all. Increasing out-of-pocket costs are a real threat to access to care by the most disadvantaged in our community.

The financing system should support the right care, delivered by the right person, in the right setting. All members of the health care team must be able to work across their full scope of practice, to ensure care is delivered in the most appropriate and efficient way. Financing models must encourage and reward continuity of care, quality of care, achievement of targeted population health outcomes and efficiency. Underpinning the delivery of team care, inter-disciplinary education should be invested in and supported, both at the student and professional levels.

4 Ensure engagement of all relevant health professions and consumers with primary health care reforms.

General practice and primary health care is not just about doctors. Building a well integrated, person-centred primary health care system will require full engagement of all relevant health professions – medical, nursing, allied health, pharmacy, and so on – as well as consumers. Structures and processes must be developed to engage with all key groups, to ensure a broad range of expertise and experience is brought to bear on the implementation of primary health care reforms such as e-health, telehealth, new models of care, and financing reforms. Among other things, measures are needed to increase the health literacy of consumers, to enable them to participate effectively not only in their own individual care, but in the development and implementation of health care reforms more broadly.

About APNA

The vision of the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is for a healthy Australia through best practice primary health care nursing.

APNA is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care including general practice. With more than 3500 members, APNA provides primary health care nurses with a voice, access to quality continuing professional development, educational resources, support and networking opportunities.



APNA continually strives to increase awareness of the role of the primary health care nurse, and to be a dynamic and vibrant organisation for its members.

Primary health care nursing is wide ranging and covers many specialist areas including general practice, Aboriginal health, aged care, occupational health and safety, telephone triage, palliative care, sexual health, drug and alcohol issues, women's health, men's health, infection control, chronic disease management, cardiovascular care, immunisation, cancer, asthma, COPD, mental health, maternal and child health, health promotion, care plans, population health, diabetes, wound management and much more.

APNA aims to:

1. Support the professional interests of primary health care nurses
2. Promote recognition of primary health care nursing as a specialised area
3. Provide professional development for primary health care nurses
4. Represent and advocate for the profession
5. Collaborate with other stakeholders to advance our mission
6. Ensure a sustainable and growing professional association, by and for primary health care nurses.