

Labor's consultation regarding its National Platform, Chapter 8: A health system for all

12 January 2018

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation regarding Labor's National Platform. We are providing this submission on behalf of our membership, Australian primary health care nurses.

Primary health care nursing refers to nursing that takes place within a range of primary health care settings, each sharing the characteristic that they are part of the first level of contact with the health system. Primary health care nurses are skilled, regulated and trusted health professionals who work in partnership with their local communities to prevent illness and promote health across the lifespan. In Australia, nurse practitioners, registered nurses (RN) and enrolled nurses (EN) practice in primary health care in a range of clinical and non-clinical roles, in urban, rural and remote settings.

APNA Submission

Promoting wellness, preventing disease, section 19

APNA is pleased that the Australian Labor Party has recognised the importance of preventative health strategies in its policy platform. Real change towards reducing obesity and chronic diseases will require a comprehensive approach that includes health education to improve self-care and health literacy but also systems change for supportive environments to make healthy choices easier. All sectors, such as health, education, industry and agriculture will need to work together to achieve this. A system for measuring and reporting on progress will also be essential for ensuring performance and accountability.

APNA recommends that the Labor party further commit to preventative health by stating its support for "setting national non-communicable disease (NCD) targets, consistent with voluntary global targets, and implementing policies and interventions to reduce NCD risk factors and underlying social determinants."¹

¹ Australian Health Policy Collaboration. Targets and indicators for chronic disease prevention in Australia. Technical paper no 2015-08. November 2015. Available from <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/AHPC/pdfs/targets-and-indicators-for-chronic-disease-prevention-in-australia.pdf>

Promoting wellness, preventing disease, section 19, dot point 5

Nurses are skilled, regulated and trusted health professionals with extensive distribution across Australia. Nurse practitioners, registered nurses (RN) and enrolled nurses (EN) practice in primary health care in a broad range of clinical and non-clinical roles, in urban, rural and remote settings. These settings include but are not limited to community health, general practice, domiciliary, education and occupational settings.

A key component of primary health care nursing is chronic disease prevention and lifestyle management. Greater utilisation of the primary health care nursing workforce particularly with regards to early intervention and more structured management can assist with reducing the burden on the health system in the long term.

APNA suggests the inclusion of primary health care professionals in the following statement as follows: “Provide greater opportunities for health professionals, particularly primary health care professionals, to provide advice and support to people about improving their lifestyles, in order to improve health outcomes and reduce hospital admissions.”

Specific examples whereby the Labor party could facilitate greater utilisation of primary health care nurses in promoting wellness and preventing disease include the following strategies:

- Reinstating the four year old health check: there are currently large gaps between formal health screening and developmental checks in the early years. A formal four year old health check delivered by nurses would reduce the risk of developmental issues not being identified and addressed in a timely manner.
- School health nurses employed at all primary and secondary schools: school health nurses can assist with reducing the risk of developmental issues and negative health outcomes (i.e. drug and alcohol abuse, tobacco smoking, eating disorders, obesity, depression, suicide and injuries) in children and young people.

Promoting wellness, preventing disease, section 20

APNA is pleased that Labor acknowledges the impact of climate change on health and suggests that statement 20 include a commitment to proactive planning and implementation of strategies to combat associated potential health risks.

Strengthening Primary Care, section 23, dot point 2 and 10

APNA supports Labor’s platform on maintaining Medicare access for nurse practitioners and midwives.

There are a growing number of primary health care nurses working in general practice. The services nurses provide in these settings vary according to their scope of practice but may include screening, vaccinations, chronic disease prevention and management. However the complexities of the current financing structure in general practice constrain primary health care nursing practice. A report by the Grattan Institute indicates that the current fee-for-service payment model in the general practice setting is not suited to managing more complex conditions such as chronic disease.² The report also suggests that simple reforms to the primary health care sector could result in savings of more than \$320 million a year on avoidable hospital admissions and chronic disease conditions. One of the reforms suggested includes paying for performance and incentives for collecting and reporting performance data rather than fee-for-service models.

² Duckett S, Swerissen H. Building better foundations for primary care. 2017. *Grattan Institute*.

APNA welcomes Labor’s commitment to “appropriately rewarding quality general practice” and suggests the following additional dot point be included: “support a general practice financial model that is flexible, uncomplicated, accessible and sustainable to facilitate better health outcomes for all Australians.”

Strengthening Primary Care, section 23, dot points 5-6

APNA suggests broadening dot point 5 to include nurse practitioners. Nurse practitioners are able to provide significant clinical care to a wide variety of patient groups, and this should be reflected in both after-hours GP care and residential aged care settings.

APNA suggests that dot point 6 specifically state that telehealth communication/consultation opportunities for nurse practitioners and GPs be available particularly in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas of need.

Specialist care, section 28

Consumers should be adequately informed about the costs of treatment prior to commencement.

APNA suggests the inclusion of an additional dot point regarding a system for open disclosure of out-of-pocket costs charged by specialists.

A hospital and secondary care system that works

APNA would like to see a greater focus on prevention of unnecessary re-hospitalisation included in the Labor policy platform with the inclusion of the following statements:

- “Improve discharge planning and post-discharge support services to avoid unnecessary re-hospitalisation.”
- “Transparent and nationally consistent data is available on re-hospitalisation under 30 days.”

Palliative Care, section 38

APNA strongly supports the expansion of the availability of advance care planning. It should be noted that advance care planning is not limited to palliative care but rather future care options more broadly. Therefore incentives should be provided for general practice to implement advance care planning with their patients. Both health professionals and patients also need to be educated about the importance of end of life care.

Nurses, section 49

Innovative models of care such as nurse clinics are associated with positive health outcomes, high levels of patient satisfaction and improved patient access to healthcare.^{3,4} Recruitment and retention of the nursing workforce may also be enhanced by greater opportunities for innovative models of nursing care. APNA is supporting nurses in primary health care to establish nurse clinics, with seed funding from the Australian Government Department of Health. Eleven sites have been selected in

³ Keleher H, Parker R, Abdulwadud O, Francis K. Systematic review of the effectiveness of primary care nursing. *Int J Nurs Pract.* 2009;15(1):16–24.

⁴ Young J, Eley D, Patterson E, Turner C. A nurse-led model of chronic disease management in general practice: Patients’ perspectives. *Australian Family Physician.* 2016;45(12):912–6.

metropolitan, rural and remote locations, based on local population health needs. Many of the population health needs identified correspond with Labor’s health priority areas such as men’s health, chronic disease and sexual health.

APNA would suggest amending the first dot point to: “provide nurses with the clinical training and workforce opportunities they need to expand their valuable role”. We would also suggest including the following additional dot point: “support innovative models of care that better utilise nursing skills and improve access to primary health care, especially screening and preventative activities”.

Primary health care nurses work across a variety of settings such as community health, general practice, domiciliary, education and occupational settings. Primary health care nurses working to the breadth of their scope of practice facilitate better outcomes for patients, enhanced productivity and value for money for health services.^{5,6} Greater support for the role of nurses in primary health care will assist with addressing the health priority areas identified in Labor’s draft policy platform such as “restore general practice as the central coordination point of primary care and lift the efficiency and effectiveness of the primary care sector to reduce pressure on hospitals.”

APNA suggests modifying dot point 4 to: “expand and support the primary health care nursing workforce”. The primary health care nursing workforce encompasses those working in aged care.

There is currently a lack of formal education and training pathways into primary health care nursing and until recently no framework for skills development and career progression.⁷ APNA has recently developed a Career and Education Framework and Toolkit for nurses in primary health care, in line with international models and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health. The framework will highlight the breadth of the primary health care nursing roles and aims to improve recruitment and retention of the workforce.

Given the lack of formal education and training pathways into primary health care nursing, APNA suggests the inclusion of the following additional dot points:

- “support newly graduated nurses and nurses transitioning into primary health care with mentoring and professional development training”
- “restore scholarship funding for nurses, especially in primary health care, to build capacity and scope of the skills needed to lift the efficiency and effectiveness of the primary care sector to reduce pressure on hospitals”

Addressing health inequality

Increasing access to vaccinations for vaccine preventable diseases is one strategy to assist with reducing health inequality. APNA believes that all Australians should have access to vaccinations against common vaccine preventable disease as set out under the national immunisation plan. APNA believes that free catch-up vaccinations should be extended to all those who denied or missed vaccinations, especially where non or under-vaccination was not of their choosing. This may include refugees and consenting children of parents who were conscientious objectors.

⁵ Merrick E, Duffield C, Baldwin R, Fry M, Stasa H. Expanding the role of practice nurses in Australia. *Contemp Nurse*. 2012;41(1):133–40.

⁶ Murray-Parahi P, Edgar V, Descallar J, Comino E, Johnson M. ENSCOPE: Scoping the Practice of Enrolled Nurses in an Australian Community Health Setting. *Int Nurs Rev*. 2017;64(1):59–68.

⁷ McKenna L, Halcomb E, Lane R, Zwar N, Russell G. An investigation of barriers and enablers to advanced nursing roles in Australian general practice. *Collegian*, 2015;22(2):183-9.

Given that a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience overcrowding, the risk of transmission of various communicable health conditions is greater in these populations. Therefore APNA suggests that free access to vaccinations such as influenza should be provided to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Addressing health inequality: Regional, rural and remote health, section 68, dot point 1

APNA believes that nurses should be listed as follows: “Promote opportunities for medical, nursing and allied health students to train in remote, rural and regional communities and encourage them to return to those areas once their training is completed.”

Addressing health inequality: The Health of People with Disabilities

Improved health screening and proactive health care will assist with more timely detection and intervention. APNA recommends the following additional dot point: “Promote and support appropriate health screening and preventative health care for people with a disability.”

Addressing health inequality: Oral health, section 94

The provision of dental care to the most vulnerable should be means tested to ensure those most at need receive the service.

Addressing health inequality: Sexual and reproductive health

APNA believes that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine should be available to all children of high school age to ensure greater coverage.

Health priority areas: Chronic disease, section 102, dot point 2

APNA suggests amending the following dot point to: “Improving access to primary health care multidisciplinary teams and explore and trial innovative models for management of chronic disease, including nurse clinics, coordinated case management, involving the community and not for profit sectors where appropriate.”

About APNA

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care. APNA champions the role of primary health care nurses; to advance professional recognition, ensure workforce sustainability, nurture leadership in health, and optimise the role of nurses in patient-centred care.

APNA is bold, vibrant and future-focused. We reflect the views of our membership and the broader profession by bringing together nurses from across Australia to represent, advocate, promote and celebrate the achievements of nurses in primary health care.

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