



MEDIA RELEASE

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Federal budget opens the door to broadening the scope of paramedic practice

The Australasian College of Paramedicine welcomes the \$235 million funding allocation towards the roll-out of 50 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (UCCs) throughout Australia announced in the federal budget and will continue to advocate with the government for the inclusion of paramedics as part of this workforce in pioneering new pathways for paramedicine to improve health care in our communities.

Paramedics are highly skilled health professionals able to work as part of multidisciplinary teams in UCCs, helping to bridge the gap between emergency departments and traditional primary care services.

“Paramedics are uniquely placed to support patients with urgent and acute non-life-threatening conditions before they need to access emergency ambulance or hospital services, resulting in fewer unnecessary emergency department presentations and a commensurate reduction in ambulance ramping,” said College CEO John Bruning. “These patients have a series of conditions that fall within the paramedic scope of practice and capability, and if we are truly committed to Building for the Future, paramedics must be a part of the equation moving forward.”

Not only is placing paramedics in UCCs practical, it’s also cost-effective and has the potential to significantly reduce costs to states, territories and the Commonwealth associated with emergency presentations, the management of chronic health conditions, and early entry into aged care. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data from 2020-2021 showed 768,716 non-urgent and 2,470,637 semi-urgent emergency department presentations where the consumer was not admitted or referred, equating to 36.7% of all emergency department presentations at a cost of \$2.78 billion per year. Providing care to these patients in the community through UCCs and other innovative community paramedicine initiatives as part of multidisciplinary teams would deliver substantial savings to the health system, likely in excess of \$1 billion per year.

Innovation is the key to improving our ailing health systems, and the \$24.7 million earmarked in the budget to fund an additional three rounds of the Innovative Models of Care Program to trial new primary care models demonstrates the government’s willingness to explore new dimensions of healthcare.

Such investment creates opportunities to address critical gaps in the health system, particularly in rural and regional areas of Australia. The College has been lobbying the government for initiatives that augment Commonwealth-funded primary care capacity through the utilisation of paramedics outside of the scope of state and territory ambulance services through the adoption of innovative community paramedicine models that involve broader domains of practice and models of care that incorporate primary care, community engagement, preventative care, response to unplanned care needs, and integration with medical, allied health, aged and social care services.

We have also been advocating for changes to current policy that provide access to workforce incentive programs, including relocation, training, and remote/rural packages, for paramedics wanting opportunities to fill gaps in the health system and workforce shortages in regional and rural areas across the country.

The opportunity now exists for a new and broader conceptualisation of healthcare provision and the long-awaited recognition of paramedics' potential as a viable, cost-effective and capable workforce able to complement and bolster health services in communities of need and in turn address the challenges impacting health service provision nationally, borne out in the shortfalls in hospitals' capacity and resourcing, workforce shortages, and ambulance ramping that are evident across the country.

“The initiatives the College is proposing will help to deliver a safer and more accessible health system with significant cost savings and improved patient-centred care. Paramedics are part of the solution, and it is important that they are recognised as such and given the scope to expand their roles for the benefit of all Australians.”

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The Australasian College of Paramedicine is a not for profit, professional member organisation representing over 11,000 paramedics and students from all around Australia & New Zealand.

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