



Supporting practice nurses

Current usage of nurses in primary health care in Australia remains lower than in other comparable health systems such as the UK and New Zealand. Practice nurses (Registered Nurses, Enrolled Nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers) can contribute significantly to the delivery of primary health care services, improving patients' access to clinically appropriate primary health care services and helping to ease the pressure on GPs.

The Australian Government is taking action through its National Health and Hospitals Network.

An additional \$390.3 million over four years is being invested into supporting a broader and more flexible role for practice nurses under the Practice Nurse Incentive Program (PNIP).

How will this initiative work?

This initiative will support an expanded and enhanced role for practice nurses with a new, simplified and streamlined financing arrangement.

Current funding for practice nurses through the Practice Incentive Program practice nurse incentive and the Medicare Benefits Schedule practice nurse items will be redirected to this simplified, single funding stream to be administered by Medicare Australia from 1 January 2012.

General practices across Australia, accredited under the general practice standards of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, including those in urban areas, as well as Aboriginal Medical Services, will be eligible for an incentive to offset the costs of employing a practice nurse.

The incentives will be \$25,000 per full time GP for a Registered Nurse and \$12,500 per full time GP for an Enrolled Nurse in recognition of the different skills of Registered Nurses and Enrolled Nurses.

The program will be capped at five incentives, meaning that practices will be eligible to receive up to \$125,000 to support their practice nursing workforce.

The new arrangements will also include:

- support for all accredited practices to employ an Aboriginal Health Worker instead of or in addition to a practice nurse (Registered Nurse or Enrolled Nurse).
- support for practices in urban areas where there are workforce shortages and Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to employ an allied health professional such as physiotherapists, dieticians and occupational therapists, instead of, or in addition to a practice nurse and/or Aboriginal Health Worker.
- a rural loading based on Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA).
- a one-off \$5,000 incentive to support eligible non-accredited practices to become accredited.



- grandfathering arrangements for the first three years of the program to ensure that practices are not adversely impacted by the restructure of the Practice Incentive Program practice nurse incentive and the MBS practice nurse items.

Practice nurses can play a key role in pro-actively supporting patients in the optimal management of their health conditions. The new arrangements will support practice nurses to undertake a broad range of activities which are not well-supported under the current financing arrangements including:

- providing preventative health programs and education programs
- quality chronic disease management and care coordination
- supported self management
- providing recall and reminder systems

What has the Government done so far to support practice nurses?

Since 2007, the Government has:

- Supported around 200 additional practices in rural and remote areas and urban areas of workforce shortage to employ a practice nurse through the PIP practice nurse incentive.
- Implemented the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) Domestic Violence Incentive as part of the Women's Safety Agenda (in 2008-09, around 160 practices received an average annual payment of around \$1,900 for acting as a referral point to domestic violence support services for women experiencing domestic violence.
- Allocated an extra 1,134 Commonwealth supported higher education places, 305 of which have been allocated to campuses in regional areas.
- Provided:
 - \$524.5 million to Health Workforce Australia for clinical training of undergraduate health professionals, including registered nurses, and training of clinical supervisors.
 - \$59.7 million to enhance the role of nurse practitioners by enabling access to certain MBS and PBS items from November 2010.
 - \$1.6 million for Bush Support Services through a crisis line and intervention service to help remove some of the barriers to recruiting and retaining health care professionals in rural, remote and isolated areas.
 - Introduced MBS rebates for a number of items for certain services provided by a practice nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker.

The costs of the initiative reflect the total new program costs to the Government.

Further information on the National Health and Hospitals Network is at
www.yourhealth.gov.au