
Cancer Council, COSA applaud principles of Rudd health reform agenda

But remote patient travel assistance left behind

The Rudd Government should be commended for addressing the inefficiencies of Australia's fragmented health system, Cancer Council Australia and the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia said today. However, remote patient travel assistance remaining a state responsibility will perpetuate geographic inequities in cancer care outcomes.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Ian Olver, and Clinical Oncological Society of Australia President, Professor Bruce Mann, welcomed in principle a number of the proposed reforms announced today by the Prime Minister.

Professor Olver said the proposal to unify the health system, establish national care standards and more transparent reporting had the potential to improve outcomes for cancer patients, whose capacity to access genuine multidisciplinary care was often described as a "lottery".

"The plan to set national care standards by ensuring clinical practice guidelines are developed and applied locally as part of best practice is a tangible example of how improvements in care can be built into a unified system," he said.

"However, we will still need to address under-utilisation of critical services such as radiotherapy, which require infrastructure and workforce investment.

"And the decision to quarantine the fragmented remote patient travel assistance schemes from centralisation is likely to mean that many benefits in a streamlined system will still bypass cancer patients in rural and remote areas."

Professor Mann said he welcomed the emphasis on better engagement with clinicians in the development of care standards and guidelines.

"The Prime Minister should be commended for acknowledging that clinicians require better support from government to take the lead in driving continuous improvement in healthcare service delivery," he said.

"It is critical that this principle is backed up by formal partnerships with independent professional clinician groups, mandating our role in reforming the health system.

"In the meantime, clinicians caring for cancer patients in rural and remote areas – who have significantly poorer treatment outcomes than metropolitan patients – will be disappointed to see no recommendation for centralised coordination of patient travel schemes."

Professor Olver said he looked forward to an announcement about the Rudd Government's disease prevention agenda, on which it campaigned so vigorously in opposition 2½ years ago.

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