

Call for health reform

Australia's health care system needs new reform on the same scale as the introduction of Medicare in the 1970s if it is to cope with the 21st Century epidemics of chronic disease, the head of a new health policy research centre at the University of Melbourne says.

Associate Professor David Dunt recently addressed the launch of the new Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics in the School of Population Health.

He said Australia's current health system urgently needs major change and both political parties in Australia agree chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease are putting a major strain on the health care system. But their policies put forward in the run-up to the federal election do little to overcome the rigidities of the existing health care system.

"These policies seem likely to fail or at the best fall well short," he said.

"Our existing system based on the fee-for-service, doctor-patient consultation was set up to deal predominantly with acute, short-term illnesses such as infections and injuries, involving the fairly limited range of interventions then available for the diagnosis and treatment.

"Around this fee-for-service system has developed our largely uncoordinated health care system based on mixed public/private health care sectors and the overlapping roles of commonwealth and state governments in both funding and delivering services."

Dunt said this is unsuitable for the treatment of chronic diseases which require teams of health professionals. The system is also unsuitable

for prevention which often requires long-term professional support to help individuals make health lifestyle changes.

Dunt said three major changes are needed including a strict separation of state and commonwealth roles; a breakdown in the separation of public and private sectors so there is only one system; and an overhaul of the Medical Benefits Scheme so that payment for services can be made to teams of health professionals providing ongoing care, rather than doctors providing one-off care.

"It's now time to introduce another new system," he said. "We need governments with the imagination and determination to adopt a new system and introduce it Australia-wide."



Reeking of booze

Alcohol detection systems may be installed in all future vehicles in a bid to eradicate drink driving, if Monash University Accident Research Centre's Dr Claes Tingvall has his way.

"Drink driving is still a major problem on our roads, and the installation of alcohol detection systems in vehicles has the potential to save many lives," Tingvall said.

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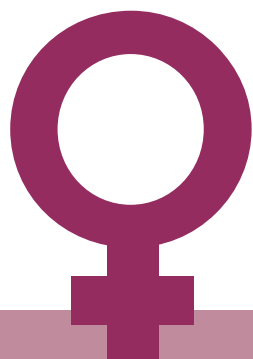
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