

## FAQs - After Hours Primary Health Care

### About The Review

#### 1. *Why was the Review conducted?*

The Review of After Hours Primary Health Care Services (the Review) was undertaken in response to recommendations made in the Review of Medicare Locals. The recommendation to review after hours services arose as a response to widespread stakeholder frustration regarding the after hours programme. The Review provided an opportunity to reflect on the after hours delivery strategy and determine how the after hours programme could be effectively administered. The Review considered the most appropriate and effective delivery mechanisms to support ongoing after hours primary health care services nationally.

#### 2. *What was the scope of the Review?*

The Review focused on existing after hours primary health care arrangements, including services that were funded and supported by Medicare Locals, and the *after hours GP helpline*. After hours Medical Benefits Schedule items were not included as part of the Review.

#### 3. *What were the Terms of Reference for the Review?*

The Terms of Reference for the Review were:

- the central role of General Practitioners and general practice in delivering after hours services;
- the policy settings required to generate innovative solutions;
- appropriate and effective delivery strategies, taking into account current and available mechanisms;
- existing infrastructure and services;
- effective and deregulated administrative arrangements;
- appropriate mechanisms for information sharing and data collection;
- opportunities for improved engagement with the private sector;
- delivery challenges in rural and remote regions;
- consumer expectations and needs;
- findings from previous evaluations of the *After Hours Primary Health Care Programme*; and
- any transition to new arrangements, including timing.

#### 4. *How was the Review conducted?*

Professor Claire Jackson, a respected General Practitioner, educator and researcher with extensive experience in primary health care and a strong interest in health system reform, conducted the Review. Professor Jackson was appointed by the then Minister for Health, the Hon Peter Dutton MP.

The consultation process included interviews with key stakeholder organisations, written submissions and in depth case studies with relevant primary health care organisations.

The Review commenced on 19 August 2014 and the report was presented to Government on 31 October 2014.

5. *What were the findings of the Review?*

Key findings of the Review were:

- funding arrangements for after hours service provision through Medicare Locals (MLs) had not been wholly successful;
- an appropriately designed, targeted, and implemented Practice Incentives Programme (PIP) after hours incentive would simplify after hours arrangements, reduce reporting burden, target best practice after hours support, and provide financial certainty to general practices that provide holistic after hours care;
- there was strong stakeholder support from the primary health care sector for a return to a PIP after hours incentive, however this should not be the complete solution for after hours service delivery; and
- there is a genuine need for a multifaceted approach, in recognition that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not effective. Establishing Primary Health Networks is an opportunity to develop flexible, locally-tailored solutions to address difficulties in access to after hours services.

[The Review report is available here.](#)

6. *What were the recommendations of the Review?*

The Review provided 13 recommendations for consideration by the Government.

The Review recommended the redirection of after hours funding to:

- a new Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive payment; and
- Primary Health Networks, who will work with key stakeholders to plan, coordinate, and support population based after hours health services, focusing on addressing gaps in after hours service provision, ‘at risk’ populations and improved service integration.

The Review also recommended that the *after hours GP helpline* (AH GPH) should not continue in its previous form. The Review highlighted a number of concerns including the suitability of conditions being referred to the AH GPH, advice resulting in unnecessary presentations to emergency departments, the high average cost per call, and limited consumer awareness.

The Government supported recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 12. The remaining, less time-critical recommendations are still being considered by Government. The full list of recommendations is provided in [the Review report](#).

7. *Where can I find the Review report?*

[The Review of After Hours Primary Health Care report is available here.](#)

Where can I find the in depth case studies conducted as a part of the Review?

The in depth case studies conducted by Ernest and Young as a part of the Review will not be publicly released as they contain commercial in confidence information.

8. *Why were certain organisations interviewed as a part of the Review but others only provided written submissions?*

Key stakeholder organisations interviewed were identified by the Department, however, several organisations requested to be interviewed as a part of the Review consultation process in addition to providing a written submission.

## **Stakeholders**

### *9. What are the new arrangements for after hours service provision?*

The new model for after hours service provision, implemented on 1 July 2015, consist of:

- a new Practice Incentives Programme (PIP) after hours incentive payment available to eligible accredited general practices registered for the PIP;
- funding to Primary Health Networks to support locally tailored after hours services; and
- a new after hours GP advice and support line to better support all Australians who do not have access to face to face GP services in the after hours period.

### *10. How has the Government ensured service continuity?*

The Australian Government is committed to maintaining frontline services that meet community need, this includes the ongoing provision of after hours services.

On 1 July 2015, new funding arrangements were implemented to ensure continuity of after hours service provision in the community. For further information on the new arrangements for after hours service provision please refer to Question 10.

The *after hours GP helpline* ceased in its previous form on 30 June 2015. The Government remains committed to Australians being able to access this service and from 1 July 2015 a new after hours GP advice and support line has been made available to better support all Australians who do not have access to face to face GP services in the after hours period. In addition, the Government continues to support the Healthdirect Australia nurse triage service. The existing 1800 022 222 free call number for this service remains unchanged to ensure consumers have 24 hour access to health information and advice.

The Government facilitated consultation between Medicare Locals and Primary Health Networks and advised general practices about the new Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive, to ensure continuity of services post 30 June 2015 and a smooth transition to the new arrangements, which commenced on 1 July 2015.

### *11. What is the new Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive?*

The Practice Incentives Programme (PIP) after hours incentive provides payments to accredited general practices that ensure their patients have access to quality after hours care.

The PIP after hours incentive simplifies the funding process to encourage practices to provide after hours services. It builds on existing infrastructure and provides general practices with a more streamlined, less administratively burdensome way to receive funding for delivering after hours services.

The PIP after hours incentive is based on a practice's Standardised Whole Patient Equivalent (SWPE).

Further details regarding the PIP after hours incentive [eligibility requirements are available here](#) or on [the Department of Human Services website](#).

*12. What are Primary Health Networks and what do they do?*

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of primary health care. PHNs commenced operations on 1 July 2015.

PHNs receive Commonwealth funding to work with key local stakeholders to plan, coordinate and support after hours health services. PHNs provide an opportunity to improve access to after hours services that are tailored to the specific needs of different communities. PHNs will focus on addressing gaps in after hours service provision, 'at risk' populations and improved service integration.

*13. What happened to the after hours GP helpline (AH GPH)?*

The Review concluded that funding for the AH GPH service should not continue in its previous form. The Government remains committed to Australians being able to access this service and from 1 July 2015 a new after hours GP advice and support line was made available to better support all Australians who do not have access to face to face GP services in the after hours period.

*14. How can consumers access the new after hours GP advice and support line?*

Consumers can access the telephone line through calling the existing 1800 022 222 free call 24/7 telephone-based nurse triage service currently operating in all states and territories except Queensland and Victoria. Callers from Queensland and Victoria can access the new telephone line through Healthdirect Australia national telephone line and 13HEALTH and NURSE-ON-CALL respectively.

The new after hours GP advice and support line is operated by Healthdirect Australia and replaced the previous *after hours GP helpline*. The new after hours GP advice and support line better targets Australians both in metropolitan and rural and remote areas who do not have access to face to face medical services in the after hours period.

*15. How do the new after hours arrangements address gaps in after hours service provision?*

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will focus on addressing gaps in after hours service provision. A recurring theme during the Review was that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to after hours service provision and PHNs will conduct needs assessments to determine the after hours needs of their localities. In rural and remote areas particularly, PHNs will develop innovative and locally-tailored solutions to support access to after hours services in these locations.

*16. What happened to Medicare Locals?*

Funding to Medicare Locals (MLs) ceased on 30 June 2015. The transfer of responsibilities from MLs to Primary Health Networks on 1 July 2015 will ensure service continuity in the provision of after hours services.

*17. How is the role of Primary Health Networks different to that of Medicare Locals?*

Medicare Locals were funded to incentivise and support both general practice and broader primary health care services to deliver after hours services. Primary Health Networks (PHNs) will not deliver services, rather receive funding to work with key local after hours stakeholders to plan, coordinate and support locally-tailored after

hours health services. As the Practice Incentives Programme (PIP) after hours incentive supports general practice in after hours arrangements, PHNs are funded to work to identify and address gaps in after hours service arrangements and improve service integration. Under the new arrangements, PHNs are not funded to replicate a PIP like after hours funding model.

*18. How are General Practitioners and other health providers involved with the new after hours arrangements?*

The new PIP after hours incentive supports general practices in after hours service provision by providing a more streamlined, less administratively burdensome way to be funded to provide after hours services.

PHNs will consult with after hours stakeholders to understand and work towards meeting the after hours health care needs of local areas. After hours stakeholders include (but are not limited to):

- General Practitioners;
- residential aged care providers;
- pharmacies;
- nurse practitioners;
- non-government organisations;
- state and territory governments; and
- any other health providers or organisations in their local communities.

## **Consumers**

*19. What has changed?*

On 1 July 2015, new after hours arrangements commenced, with an aim to improve access for all Australians to after hours primary health care. The new after hours arrangements consist of:

- a new Practice Incentives Programme (PIP) after hours incentive payment available to eligible accredited general practices registered for the PIP; and
- funding to Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to support locally-tailored after hours services; and
- a new after hours GP advice and support line.

Funding to Medicare Locals (MLs) ceased on 30 June 2015. The transfer of responsibilities from MLs to PHNs on 1 July 2015 will ensure service continuity in the provision of after hours services.

The *after hours GP helpline* ceased in its previous form on 30 June 2015. The Government remains committed to Australians being able to access this service and from 1 July 2015 a new after hours GP advice and support line was made available to better support all Australians who do not have access to face to face GP services in the after hours period.

Additionally, the Government continues to support the Healthdirect Australia nurse triage service. The existing 1800 022 222 free call number for this service remains unchanged to ensure consumers have 24 hour access to health information and advice.

*20. Why did the after hours arrangements change?*

A key focus of the Government is to strengthen Australia's primary health care system, including in the after hours period, by addressing fragmentation and disjointed health care that negatively impacts on health outcomes and increase health costs.

The Review provided an opportunity to improve the efficacy and efficiency of after hours primary health care across Australia, and the new after hours arrangements ensure access for all Australians to high quality after hours care. The new arrangements better support after hours primary health care services to ensure patients receive the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

*21. How do the new after hours arrangements improve access to after hours services for consumers?*

The new model for after hours service delivery ensures that all Australians have the most appropriate and efficient access to quality primary health care services in the after hours period. The new arrangements better support effective frontline after hours services that meet community need, to help ensure that patients receive the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

The new PIP after hours incentive simplifies the process to encourage and support practices to provide after hours services, with the aim of increasing services for consumers in the after hours period.

The new after hours GP advice and support line provides access to medical advice and support for patients in metropolitan and rural and remote areas who do not have access to face to face GP services in the after hours period.

*22. How does the new Primary Health Network system improve patient care in the after hours period?*

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) receive Commonwealth funding to work with key stakeholders to plan, coordinate, and support population based after hours health services, focusing on addressing gaps in after hours service provision, 'at risk' populations and improved service integration.

PHNs will improve patient outcomes in the after hours period by working collaboratively with health professionals and services to integrate and facilitate a seamless patient experience, including the flow of information between service providers. PHNs will increase consumer awareness of after hours services available in their community and improve patient confidence on the appropriate services to access and when.

*23. How do the new after hours arrangements support people with chronic or complex conditions?*

The new after hours arrangements better support individuals with chronic or complex conditions as a greater number of services will be available in the after hours period. The new Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive aims to result in patients, including those with chronic or complex conditions, being able to see General Practitioners outside of standard hours in urgent situations. Primary Health Networks will focus on addressing gaps in after hours service provision, particularly for 'at risk' populations, including individuals with chronic or complex conditions.

*24. Am I be able to see a doctor when I need to, for example in the early hours of the morning or on the weekend?*

The new after hours arrangements, particularly the new Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive, support practices to provide after hours services, resulting in the increased availability of services in the after hours period. This means that patients are able to see General Practitioners outside of standard hours in urgent situations, for example in the early hours of the morning or on the weekend.