

System only as good as the prevention it delivers

22 July 2024



Health systems work better if they are designed to meet the contemporary needs of the community and to deliver what they aim to achieve – healthy people who stay that way. However, as we have been reminded through National Diabetes Week and with the report [Diabetes in Australia 2024](#), recently tabled by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport demonstrates, our system is nowhere near as good as it needs to be at preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, from developing in the first place.

‘Fundamental reform of our health system is overdue,’ says Ms Kylie Woolcock, CEO, Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA).

‘Too much of the capacity in our health system is tied up in coping with problems once the surge hits. Some, like COVID will hit us suddenly. Others, like diabetes, increase over decades. For many people with diabetes, especially Type 2 – the most common type – the disease is preventable. The same is true of other chronic diseases; more of us are getting them, we’re getting them younger, and we might have avoided it.’

‘By focussing much needed attention on diabetes, the Standing Committee has highlighted, not only the strain our system is under but also the structural realignment that is required for the system to remain contemporary.’

The report notes that, despite being mostly avoidable, diabetes is the fastest-growing non-communicable disease in Australia, with around 1.5 million Australians living with diabetes and around 500,000 more cases being undiagnosed. In 2020-21 diabetes accounted for 10 per cent of all hospitalisations.

The Committee also reported evidence showing diabetes costs Australians in the order of \$17-20 billion a year.

‘Australia is currently spending more on dealing with the impacts of diabetes than all governments in Australia spend on childcare, including preschool. This demonstrates why we need a health system that places far greater value on prevention and on health outcomes.’

‘This will require a comprehensive whole of government response. The recommendations of the report are a good step in the right direction. Future investments in health must be optimised and directed towards wellness and away from crisis-driven demand,’ continued Ms Woolcock.

‘We need a shared resolve to put community health needs first, to reduce and manage the prevalence of disease, to intervene early and retain the capacity to treat the disease effectively when prevention, nor early intervention measures are not enough.’

‘Inevitably, health reform will be complex and take time, but we cannot afford to delay health-enabling outcome-driven reform any longer. More of the same means more disease, paid for at an escalating cost.’

The online version of this [media release](#) can be found on the AHHA website. **The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.**

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The current 'Scope of Practice' review of the health workforce, the Strengthening Medicare agenda and the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review of the National Health Reform Agreement provide an effective platform for delivering the reform needed to reorientate our healthcare system towards a contemporary, fit for purpose system that will meet the needs and expectations of Australians.

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