

Media Release

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Communicating Access to Integrated Health Care

Speech Pathology Australia welcomes the recommendations of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission to reshape the ailing health system and establish comprehensive primary health care centres and services.

“We applaud the Government’s integrated strategy for helping people at all stages of the lifespan to access the appropriate specialised services in a timely and affordable manner,” said Dr Cori Williams, President of Speech Pathology Australia.

Speech pathologists champion the importance of early intervention and support the Commission’s focus on ‘nurturing a healthy start to life’. Speech pathologists have an important role to play in the early identification and prevention of language, learning and literacy disorders. Comprehensive prevention strategies will ameliorate the long term health outcomes for an individual, as well as reduce high costs to the community.

“It is imperative that primary health care centres include the full range of allied health professionals, including speech pathologists. Direct access to multidisciplinary health care would strongly improve health outcomes throughout the community and reduce unnecessary hospital visits,” said Dr Williams.

“There can be a common misperception that chronic disease only includes specific medically based conditions (ie diabetes, heart disease), but this ignores the thousands of Australians with developmental and acquired disabilities, such as complex speech and language disorders, which can impact their long term social, education and health outcomes.

“The key to positive health outcomes for individuals is for them to have direct and equitable access to the full range of health professionals, including speech pathologists, so that identification and intervention for chronic disease and complex developmental and acquired disorders can occur in a holistic manner.

“Additional funding at the hospital level needs to actively assist a patient to transition home. For example where swallowing problems occur post-stroke, a speech pathologist will ensure the individual can swallow and eat safely without choking, so that they can be discharged home. However continuing speech pathology follow-up for these patients in the community is essential.

“We welcome the new federally funded coordination of out-patient care, maternal and child health care and community health centres. This will ensure greater coordination of care, and a more seamless transition from hospital to home,” said Dr Williams.

Speech pathologists may be the first point of contact with the health system for clients with communication and swallowing disorders, and thus play a crucial role in the provision of services that keep people healthy and out of hospital.

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Speech Pathology Australia is the peak body for more than 4,500 members who specialise in working with people of all ages who have communication or swallowing difficulties.
For further information visit www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

Interviews:

- Dr Cori Williams, President, is available for interview to discuss the impact of the National Health and Hospital’s Reform Commission Report on those with speech and language disorders.

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