

Foreword

This report is part of a series of publications reviewing the quality of health care across selected OECD countries. As health costs continue to climb, policy makers increasingly face the challenge of ensuring that substantial spending on health is delivering value for money. At the same time, concerns about patients occasionally receiving poor quality health care have led to demands for greater transparency and accountability. Despite this, there is still considerable uncertainty over which policies work best in delivering health care that is safe, effective and provides a good patient experience, and which quality-improvement strategies can help deliver the best care at the least cost. *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality* seek to highlight and support the development of better policies to improve quality in health care, to help ensure that the substantial resources devoted to health are being used effectively in supporting people to live healthier lives.

This report reviews the quality of health care in Australia, seeks to highlight best practices, and provides a series of targeted assessments and recommendations for further quality gains in health care. Particular attention is given to primary health care; the implementation of national standards for health service accreditation; and rural and remote health care. The Australian health system is a complex mix of federal and state government funding and responsibility, interspersed with services delivered through the public and private sectors. Significant progress in national approaches to quality monitoring and improvement includes the introduction of national standards for hospital accreditation. Australia, however, is facing the challenge of rising chronic disease, making strengthening prevention and primary health care a priority. To ease health system fragmentation, Australia should adopt a system-wide approach to quality and performance through an enhanced federal government role in steering policy, funding, co-ordination, priority setting, performance monitoring and assessment. The states and territories, in turn, should take on a strengthened role as health service providers. Responsibility for primary care should be devolved to the states and territories to encourage innovation and comprehensive attention to local population need. A less fragmented health system will improve care co-ordination, particularly for patients with multiple chronic conditions.

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