

AMA plan doesn't remove our concerns - Indigenous doctors

22 August 2014

Australia's Indigenous doctors say the AMA Medicare co-payment plan does not address the concerns of the Aboriginal and Torres Islander community.

President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA), Dr Tammy Kimpton, said that Indigenous doctors were disappointed that the AMA's "Alternative Model" for Medicare co-payments makes no mention of Indigenous Australians.

"Despite clear evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples suffer from the worst health of any section of the Australian community and that they consistently appear at the bottom of Australia's socio-economic ladder, the AMA's proposal does little to protect them from the disincentive of the \$7 Medicare co-payment," she said.

Dr Kimpton said that the AMA plan does nothing to address the acknowledged financial impact of the proposed co-payment on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services.

"The Federal Government's co-payment plan has been universally rejected by the Indigenous health sector because we know that any co-payment will provide a disincentive for our people to visit a GP and we have spent the past decades working hard to encourage our peoples to visit doctors; the original proposal and the AMA's plan both fly in the face of all the evidence.

"Both proposals work against the comprehensive primary health care model that our sector has strongly advocated for and remains committed to.

"So much so that nearly all community-controlled health services have publically said they won't collect the co-payment and will consequently lose a significant proportion of their income. Is the Government's intention really to reduce the funds available to our front-line services?

"One service, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, with a strong track record of effective primary health care, particularly in the area of birth weight and maternal health, has estimated that its income will be reduced by nearly \$700,000. I have to ask what services will Congress be forced to cut if the co-payment plan is actually implemented?" said Dr Kimpton.

Dr Kimpton said that the co-payment idea must be abandoned in the face of strong evidence that it will lead to reduced doctor visits by those most needing medical care and advice, particularly those with chronic illness.

"There is already anecdotal evidence that even the discussion about the \$7 co-payment has caused some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients to reduce their visits to their GP.

"I think it's time that the Government sat down with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak health bodies so they can better understand the implications of this policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," concluded Dr Kimpton.