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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



College of GPs welcomes new step for e-health

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) welcomes the Government's latest step in implementing the e-health agenda, with the Minister for Health and Ageing, The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, presenting the *Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010* to Parliament today.

The proposed national Healthcare Identifiers Service aims to implement and maintain a national system for uniquely identifying healthcare providers and individuals and is planned to be available from July 2010.

Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President, said that the vast majority of GPs are already using computers for a range of health services and as such, the RACGP recognises the importance of building a robust and future looking e-health system for Australia.

"In order to create a safe, reliable and timely healthcare environment, it will be of utmost importance to quickly and adequately identify patients, whilst maintaining the flexibility to provide anonymous services to those who require them.

"If we get it right, the national Healthcare Identifiers Service is the cornerstone to make e-health work," said Dr Mitchell.

"The correct implementation of individual and healthcare provider identifiers is important because it will help to lead to a safer and more efficient means of distributing medical records between healthcare providers such as general practitioners, hospitals, specialists and pharmacies. It also greatly reduces the risk of avoidable errors.

"Whilst the RACGP in principle supports the development and implementation of a national Healthcare Identifiers Service, there must be clarity regarding the following prior to progressing the system:

- privacy safeguards, including who will have access to patient information and informed consent
- communication strategy for the implementation process, including stages and timelines
- implementation issues, including integration into general practice software and funding for general practices to support required software and business changes
- application of health identifiers, including when to apply anonymous health identifiers

"The passing of this legislation is paving the path for the future. Healthcare identifiers are an important building block to enable a national Individual Electronic Health Record (IEHR) system," concluded Dr Mitchell.

To read the RACGP's submission to the Department of Health and Ageing: Exposure Draft Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 in detail, visit www.racgp.org.au/healthreform/35827.

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Notes to the editors

The Health Identifier Service will assign three types of healthcare identifiers:

- Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) – for individuals receiving healthcare services
- Healthcare Provider Identifier – Individual (HPI-I) – for healthcare professionals and other health personnel involved in providing patient care
- Healthcare Provider Identifier – Organisation (HPI-O) – for organisations (such as the hospital or health clinic) where healthcare is provided

For more information about the Health Identifier Service, visit www.nehta.gov.au/connecting-australia/healthcare-identifiers.

Medicare Australia will be the initial operator of the HI Service.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice, and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners. Visit www.racgp.org.au.