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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



Australia's health care system is one of the best

A new report released today ranks Australia's health care system as world leading but highlights that access to our health care system can be problematic.

The latest Commonwealth Fund report includes data from seven countries – United States, Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – and incorporates patient's and physician's survey results on care experiences and ratings on dimensions of care.

The full 'How the Performance of the U.S. Health Care System Compares Internationally 2010 Update' report is available at www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Fund-Reports/2010/Jun/Mirror-Mirror-Update.aspx.

Among the seven nations studied, the United States ranks last overall, despite having the most expensive health system in the world. The Netherlands rank first, followed closely by the United Kingdom and Australia.

Australia ranks first in 'long, health, productive lives' and second in 'effective care', 'patient centred care' and 'efficiency'. Overall, Australia ranks third, but unfortunately rates poorly with regards to access.

Dr Chris Mitchell, RACGP President, said that despite the fact that Australia's health care system is already regarded as a world leader in some categories, more needs to be done.

"We have an excellent general practice centred health care system in Australia. However, we have to remember that some of our communities – such as some of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – do not receive the health care that they should receive in a wealthy first world nation.

"This report shows clearly that we need to do better with access.

"Since 2002, GP supply has fallen by two per cent, while other specialist supply has increased by 17 per cent. This means increased health costs and worsening health outcomes for patients because they cannot see a GP when they need to see one.

"Our current general practice workforce is ageing, with the average age of vocationally recognised GPs now over 50 years. Investment in general practice training is critically important to combat general practice workforce shortages throughout Australia.

"Recently there have been significant and much needed increases in prevocational and vocational GP training places and GP supervisor support, which will contribute to

addressing workforce shortages across Australia, hence making it easier for people to see a GP faster.

“This investment reaffirms the central role of general practice and primary health care in our health system.

“If the Federal Government continues to invest directly in general practice, we are on the track to rank first in the next Commonwealth Fund report,” concluded Dr Mitchell.

– *ends*

Notes to the editor:

About The Commonwealth Fund

The Commonwealth Fund is a private foundation that promotes a high performance health care system providing better access, improved quality, and greater efficiency. The Fund’s work focuses particularly on society’s most vulnerable, including low-income people, the uninsured, minority Americans, young children, and elderly adults. The Fund carries out this mandate by supporting independent research on health care issues and making grants to improve health care practice and policy. An international program in health policy is designed to stimulate innovative policies and practices in the United States and other industrialized countries. Visit www.commonwealthfund.org/About-Us.aspx.

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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.