

PRESS RELEASE

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THE HEALTH CARE CHOICE - HIGHER TAXES, DECLINING SERVICES OR INCREASED COMPETITION

Mr Graeme Samuel, President of the National Competition Council challenged the health industry and governments to deliver better patient care through increased competition, or start making hard choices between cutting services and increasing taxes.

In a speech to the World Bank's Human Development Week in Washington DC, Mr Samuel presented a blueprint for greater competition and choice in the delivery of health services. Specifically the blueprint recommends;

- increasing competition in the delivery of health services
- concentrating the government's role to that of planner, funder and regulator, and
- enabling competitive purchasing agencies to assist patients in choosing health service options that best meets their overall needs.

"This blueprint for increased competition will provide incentives to ensure;

- increased responsiveness to patient needs and preferences
- greater efficiencies in service delivery, and
- access for all people to quality health services regardless of their ability to pay," Mr Samuel said.

“Health care already places huge demands on government budgets. Lost efficiencies in the health sector are in effect paid for by reductions in other government services such as education, housing and infrastructure.”

“The alternative to increased competition is less patient choice, increasing costs, declining services and/or increasing taxes. This is clearly not an alternative for a caring, responsible society.

Mr Samuel said that increasing competition in Australia’s health system will bring increased responsiveness to patient preferences and therefore innovation to services.

“By introducing greater competition governments, administrators and health professionals, will have clear incentives to take into account patient preferences and improve care options,” Mr Samuel said.

“Government and professional regulation of health care has robbed patients of their power as health care consumers to indicate choice. In short, service providers have determined when, where and what services to provide. With increased competition, patients will be able to demand more information on service options that better meet their overall needs.”

“Governments, health professionals and administrators should work with patients to ensure care which best suits each individual. Patients have a right, and a desire, to know all the options and to contribute to their own health management,” Mr Samuel concluded.

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