

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS MEETING

14 July 2006

COMMUNIQUE

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 18th meeting today in Canberra. The Council, comprising the Prime Minister, Premiers, the Chief Ministers of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory and the President of the Australian Local Government Association, had detailed discussions on significant areas of national interest.

Mental Health

COAG has agreed to a National Action Plan on Mental Health involving a joint package of measures and significant new investment by all governments over five years that will promote better mental health and provide additional support to people with mental illness, their families and their carers. The value of measures covered in the Individual Implementation Plans for each jurisdiction totals approximately \$4 billion over five years. The Plan sets out agreed outcomes, specific policy directions for action that emphasise coordination and collaboration between government, private and non-government providers in order to deliver a more seamless and connected care system.

This National Action Plan represents a commitment to deliver mental health services in a more integrated way – between governments, and between the government and non-government sectors. Governments have agreed to a model of community-based coordinated care for people with serious mental illness who are most likely to benefit and who are most at risk of falling through the gaps in the system.

This National Action Plan also outlines a series of new initiatives that will be implemented over a five-year period. All governments have agreed to continued investment in the area after this time. The Plan focuses on promotion, prevention and early intervention; improving mental health services; providing opportunities for increased recovery and participation in the community and employment, including through more stable accommodation; providing better coordinated care; and building workforce capacity.

The success of the Plan requires continuing effort by all governments. COAG has therefore agreed to establish a COAG Mental Health Group in each State and Territory. These groups will involve the Commonwealth and the States and Territories working together to coordinate the implementation of their commitments. The success of the Plan will also be monitored against nationally-agreed progress measures over a five-year period and will be subject to an independent review after five years.

Health Workforce

Australia's health system relies on the dedication and skill of its workforce to deliver high-quality care for all Australians. COAG has agreed to a package of reforms to help ensure that the health workforce is able to respond to the evolving care needs of the Australian community, while maintaining the quality and safety of health services. The Commonwealth's total contribution to the package is in the order of \$300 million over four years.

In February 2006, COAG received a report from the Productivity Commission on *Australia's Health Workforce*. COAG's response to this report is described in this communique, with further details at [Attachment A](#).

Strengthening the Health Workforce

COAG noted that the Commonwealth and the States and Territories are undertaking significant investments to address health workforce shortages. The Commonwealth announced on 8 April 2006 that it would provide 400 new medical school places and 1,000 new higher education nursing places. Today, the Commonwealth has agreed to provide an additional 205 medical school places, including five places for Tasmania. COAG has agreed that the Chief Ministers from Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory will write to the Prime Minister about medical school places in their jurisdictions. To support these places, the Commonwealth and Victoria will jointly provide a total of \$46 million in capital funding for medical schools at Deakin and Monash Universities. The Commonwealth has offered to provide further capital funding of about \$26 million for New England, Queensland and James Cook Universities, subject to matching funding from the States. The Commonwealth will also provide about \$120 million over four years to fund the 605 new medical places and \$93 million over four years to fund the additional nursing places. In addition, the Commonwealth will provide about \$31 million over four years to increase its contribution toward the cost of nurses' clinical training from about \$690 to \$1,000 a year per full-time student.

As the major employer in the sector, the States and Territories have always partnered the Commonwealth in its education of medical and nursing students by providing clinical placements. The States and Territories have agreed to guarantee to provide high-quality clinical placements and intern training for Commonwealth-funded medical and nursing students. States and Territories have also agreed to continue to invest significantly in on-the-job and post-graduate training for these health professionals.

States and Territories are playing their part in systematically addressing health workforce needs, and have always supported the Commonwealth in its responsibility for university education of health students by providing clinical placements and for many, pre-registration employment. States and Territories remain willing to play their part in attracting, retaining and developing the health workforce, including through:

- New South Wales is funding recruitment and retention initiatives for the nursing health workforce as well as for targeted recruitment, education and training strategies for the health workforce. In support of the oral health

workforce, New South Wales will recruit more dentists, allied dental health providers and specialists;

- Queensland, amongst other things, is funding 235 medical students; is increasing the number of specialist trainee positions by 75 places; and is increasing the number of TAFE places for health workers by 1500 over the next three years;
- Victoria has recently announced extra funding for internships, extra specialist places, and TAFE places for 1500 extra nurses and 420 extra allied health staff;
- Western Australia's commitment to training, recruitment and retention of the health workforce during 2006-07 includes expenditure on specialist trainees, nursing programmes, mental health recruitment and retention programmes, and a podiatry clinical training facility at University of Western Australia. Other funded training programmes planned for 2006-07 include Population Health, Enrolled Nurse training for Aboriginal people, and scholarships for Nurse Practitioners and Radiation/Nuclear Medicine students;
- South Australia has completed a Generational Health Review and State Strategic Plan that have set numerous health targets focussing on prevention;
- Tasmania has committed funding towards the building of a new medical clinical school at the University of Tasmania at Hobart; is improving nurse training with the appointment of 43 clinical nurse educators; and allocated funds in 2006- 07 for on-going employment of new dentists and trainers, scholarships for dental training and the development of a new clinical training facility in Hobart;
- the Northern Territory has funded six medical students and has provided additional funding for clinical training. The Northern Territory has also provided additional funding for health worker training including support for post-graduate nursing training; and
- the Australian Capital Territory has committed significant resources to health workforce initiatives. These measures include better coordination of medical appointments and junior doctor training; recruitment and retention measures for nurses, midwives and allied health including scholarships for new staff and those re-entering the workforce.

Improved Structures to support Health Workforce Reform

COAG noted the importance of ensuring that health education and training is better aligned with workforce needs. To assist with this, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories signed a Memorandum of Understanding for better consultation on health-related university places. COAG agreed that the responsibilities of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) would be expanded to include annual agreement on national workforce priorities and advice on education and training that addresses current and emerging national skills shortages. COAG also agreed to establish a taskforce on the national

health workforce, reporting to the Australian Health Ministers' Conference through the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, to undertake project-based work and advise on workforce innovation and reform.

More Effective Use of the Health Workforce

The Commonwealth will introduce a new Medicare item for practice nurses and registered Aboriginal health workers to provide ongoing support for patients with chronic disease for, and on behalf of, general practitioners. This item, with other Commonwealth initiatives supporting practice nurses, will be available for services provided by registered nurse practitioners, working for, and on behalf of, general practitioners, where Medicare and other programme requirements are met.

Facilitating Workforce Responsiveness and Mobility

In order to facilitate workforce mobility, improve safety and quality, and reduce red tape, COAG has agreed to establish by July 2008 a single national registration scheme for health professionals, beginning with the nine professions currently registered in all jurisdictions. COAG has agreed to undertake consultation with stakeholders on its preferred model of a national cross-professional registration body which would also involve health professions participating in the scheme's governance through profession-specific panels and committees. COAG noted that this is the first tranche of national registration and that other professional groups (including Aboriginal Health Workers) may be added over time. Further information on the preferred model is at [Attachment B](#).

COAG further agreed to establish by July 2008 a single national accreditation scheme for health education and training, in order to simplify and improve the consistency of current arrangements. COAG has agreed to undertake consultation with stakeholders on its preferred model for the scheme which would ensure that accreditation activities retain and draw on essential health profession-specific expertise. Further information on the preferred model is at [Attachment C](#). Both the national registration scheme and national accreditation scheme would be self-funding, with establishment costs jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.

COAG also agreed that health ministers will implement initiatives to establish by December 2006 a national process for the assessment of overseas-trained doctors.

Strengthening the Health Workforce in Rural and Remote Areas and in Indigenous Communities

COAG noted that, in order to attract more general practitioners with procedural skills to rural areas, and subject to the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine's training programme being accredited by the Australian Medical Council, the Commonwealth will provide rural medicine with formal recognition under Medicare as a generalist discipline by April 2007. COAG agreed that health ministers should provide, by the end of 2006, options to improve service delivery in rural and remote areas. In addition, the Commonwealth's increase in medical school places will lead to an expansion in the number of medical school places bonded to areas of workforce shortage, and in Commonwealth programmes supporting rural students, including Indigenous students, and training.

COAG also agreed to enhancements to the health workforce servicing Indigenous communities. As part of the provision of the 605 medical school places, universities will continue to be supported to encourage selection of Indigenous applicants for entry into medicine. New chronic disease treatment arrangements under the Medicare Benefits Scheme for practice nurses, nurse practitioners and registered Aboriginal health workers will also provide Indigenous communities with greater access to the sorts of health services they most need. Other initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of doctors in rural and remote areas, and at better managing rural and remote health services between the Commonwealth and States and Territories, will also benefit Indigenous Australians.

Better Specialist Training

In order to help ensure that medical specialist trainees have appropriate skills and experience, COAG agreed that the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will establish by January 2008 a system for these trainees to undertake rotations through an expanded range of settings beyond traditional public teaching hospitals, which could include a range of public settings (including regional, rural and ambulatory settings), the private sector (hospitals and practices), community settings and non-clinical (for example, simulated learning) environments.

Ensuring Reforms are Successfully Delivered

COAG agreed that Senior Officials will receive an annual report and COAG will receive a biennial report on the implementation of health workforce reforms and progress against the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework. In addition, COAG also agreed to request the Commonwealth Treasurer to task the Productivity Commission to undertake a further review of the health workforce by July 2011.

National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic

Leaders signed a statement of cooperation on human influenza pandemic committing to work together and in partnership with the Australian community to meet the challenges faced by pandemic influenza.

COAG endorsed the National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic, which provides for clear national leadership in the event of a pandemic. The National Action Plan sets out how Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments will cooperate in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery with defined responsibilities and lines of authority to support the communities they serve.

COAG also agreed to work cooperatively to refine the National Action Plan in the light of emerging evidence, lessons learnt from a simulation exercise to be held in Australia later this year, and as national policy directions are further developed.

COAG National Reform Agenda (NRA): Human Capital, Competition and Regulatory Reform

COAG reaffirmed its February 2006 commitment to progress the National Reform Agenda, encompassing human capital, competition and regulatory reforms, to help underpin Australia's future prosperity. This is a long-term and integrated agenda across governments and portfolios to increase the nation's productivity and workforce

participation. COAG recognised the benefits to the economy and community of concerted actions to progress the three streams of the NRA, and the potential costs of failing to do so.

COAG noted the good progress made since February 2006 in advancing the National Reform Agenda, as set out under each stream of work below.

In moving forward, COAG has tasked officials with completing specific reform proposals for its consideration at its next meeting. These reform proposals will include, as necessary and appropriate, agreed policy directions, outcomes and commitments, multilateral and jurisdictional specific actions, progress measures and milestones. Each specific reform proposal would specify those actions to be done jointly and those actions that will be done by individual jurisdictions.

Specific reform proposals will recognise the importance of jurisdictional diversity and flexibility for policy innovation.

Human Capital

As a first tranche of human capital reforms to impact on the agreed outcomes, COAG agreed that work will be undertaken on specific reform proposals in four initial priority areas, namely:

- early childhood – with the aim of supporting families in improving childhood development outcomes in the first five years of a child’s life, up to and including school entry;
- diabetes – with the aim of improving health outcomes focusing initially on diabetes and building on the national Chronic Disease Strategy and the Australian Better Health Initiative;
- literacy and numeracy – with the aim of improving student outcomes on literacy and numeracy; and
- child care – with the aim of encouraging and supporting workforce participation of parents with dependent children.

Leaders also agreed the following 11 indicative high-level outcomes as a framework for the human capital agenda to improve participation and productivity:

- significantly improve the proportion of children that are born healthy (*subsidiary outcome: The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children is closed.*);
- significantly improve the proportion of children acquiring the basic skills for life and learning (*subsidiary outcome: The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children is closed.*);
- reduce the proportion of the working age population not participating and/or under-participating in paid employment due to illness, injury or disability;
- reduce the incidence of preventable chronic disease and serious injury amongst the working age population;
- reduce the prevalence of key risk factors that contribute to chronic disease;
- increase the effectiveness of the health system in achieving health outcomes;
- increase the proportion of young people meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and improve overall levels of achievement;

- increase the proportion of young people making a smooth transition from school to work or further study;
- increase the proportion of adults who have the skills and qualifications needed to enjoy active and productive working lives;
- improve overall workforce participation, with a particular focus on target groups, in a manner consistent with the long-term interests of the individual and the economy, giving due regard to productivity; and
- increase the provision of flexible working arrangements within the workforce, in a manner consistent with the long-term interests of the individual and the economy.

Leaders are committed to measuring progress on the human capital agenda. As a result, indicative progress measures have been developed (see [Attachment D](#)). Further work on the reliability and availability of data will be undertaken before December 2006.

COAG agreed that:

- MCEETYA would report to COAG in December 2006 on recommendations for action for youth transitions that could have the greatest impact on productivity and participation, within the framework and objectives of the human capital agenda; and
- the Ministerial Council on Vocational and Technical Education that is to report to COAG in December 2006 on the possible further reform of the vocational education and training system to support improved productivity for Australia's workforce, also do so within the framework and objectives of the human capital agenda.

Competition

COAG noted the good progress in developing and implementing the competition stream of the NRA, which incorporates reforms aimed at boosting Australia's productivity, competition and the efficient functioning of markets. These reforms have the potential to increase significantly Australia's international competitiveness and deliver substantial benefits to the Australian economy.

COAG also noted the important milestones that have been achieved since the 10 February 2006 COAG meeting including:

- the establishment of the COAG Energy Reform Implementation Group and the release of an issues paper;
- work commencing on the Urban Congestion Review; and
- the Productivity Commission releasing its issues paper on its *Review of Economic Costs of Freight Infrastructure and Efficient Approaches to Transport Pricing*, and undertaking public consultation.

COAG has agreed that specific reform proposals in the areas of transport, energy and infrastructure regulation, reflecting the reform commitments agreed by COAG in February, will be available for COAG's consideration in early 2007.

Reducing the Regulatory Burden

At its last meeting on 10 February 2006, COAG committed to reduce the regulatory burden across all three levels of government. This included agreeing to a range of

measures to ensure best-practice regulation making and review and action to address six specific regulation ‘hotspots’ where cross-jurisdictional overlap is impeding economic activity.

COAG today agreed to address four further areas for cross-jurisdictional regulatory reform, in addition to the six areas agreed to at its 10 February 2006, meeting as follows:

- environmental assessment and approvals processes;
- business name, Australian Business Number and related business registration processes;
- personal property securities; and
- product safety.

A full set of the recommendations agreed by COAG are in [Attachment E](#).

The *Report of the Taskforce on Reducing Regulatory Burdens on Business* made a number of recommendations with Commonwealth-State implications. The Commonwealth’s interim response to this report sought cooperation from the States and Territories in progressing through COAG the issues of a National Mine Safety Framework, harmonising the tax base and administrative arrangements of payroll tax regimes across jurisdictions, and to give high priority to developing national consistency in occupational health and safety standards. Work on these issues is being progressed through the relevant ministerial councils.

COAG agreed that officials would develop specific reform proposals reflecting the commitments made today and in February which COAG will consider in early 2007.

Funding Arrangements for the NRA

The Commonwealth confirmed that it will provide funding to the States and Territories on a case-by-case basis once specific implementation plans have been developed, if funding is needed to ensure a fair sharing of the costs and benefits of reform. Payments to the States and Territories and, where appropriate, to local government, would be linked to achieving agreed actions or progress measures and to demonstrable economic benefits, and would take into account the relative costs and proportional financial benefits to the Commonwealth, States, Territories and local government of specific reform proposals. Any Commonwealth funding:

- could take the form of Commonwealth and/or shared funding for specific initiatives, and/or payments from the Commonwealth linked to results;
- would be in addition to other Commonwealth funding; and
- would be decided on by the Commonwealth.

COAG also agreed that funding implications, where appropriate, will be considered by all jurisdictions once each specific reform proposal has been substantively developed. COAG agreed that each specific reform proposal will include, as a package, the actions that will be done jointly and the actions that will be done by individual jurisdictions.

COAG agreed that specific reform proposals will include information on the direct costs to jurisdictions for proposed actions, including any costs to address any significant economic adjustment costs.

COAG also agreed that once specific reform proposals have been considered by COAG on a case-by-case basis there will be an independent assessment of the relative costs and benefits of each of the reform proposals. Assessments would give due regard to economic, demographic, geographic and other differences between jurisdictions. The assessment would be undertaken by the COAG Reform Council (CRC) for jurisdictional consideration. Each jurisdiction would retain full discretion as to how they act upon the assessment from the CRC. The CRC would draw on the work of the Productivity Commission on assessing the potential benefits of the NRA.

To expedite the process, proposals will be brought forward to COAG out-of-session with assessment of costs and benefits able to occur once proposals have been developed.

COAG Reform Council

The CRC would be independent and would comprise up to six members. The CRC will comprise a Chairman appointed by the Commonwealth, a Deputy Chairman appointed by the States and Territories, and four members to be agreed by COAG, with at least one member having the appropriate skill sets with regional and remote experience. COAG would agree on staffing arrangements for the CRC.

Climate Change

COAG noted the first reports and updates from the COAG Climate Change Group (CCCG), which was established following its 10 February 2006 meeting to implement the Plan of Collaborative Action on Climate Change.

In response to the outcomes of the first tranche of work from the Plan of Collaborative Action on Climate Change, COAG has agreed that in addition to the work already underway:

- additional public fora will be held by the CCCG during 2006-07; and
- the CCCG will report by December 2006 on options for undertaking energy technology roadmaps to address gaps in technology support.

In relation to energy and greenhouse gas emissions reporting, COAG agreed that a single streamlined system that imposes the least cost and red tape burden is the preferable course of action. To this end:

- COAG agreed that Senior Officials report back to COAG in December 2006 with a proposal for streamlining emissions and energy reporting in line with the above objectives. The report should be based on the preparation of national purpose-built legislation to provide for cost-effective mandatory reporting and disclosure at the company level at the earliest practicable date. The report will also need to include advice on timing, thresholds and governance arrangements;
- COAG also agreed that the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) would not be used as a vehicle for reporting greenhouse gas emissions and that no further work be undertaken by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council on incorporating greenhouse gas emission reporting in the NPI pending finalisation of the above report; and

- COAG further agreed that every effort should be made to reach agreement on a national purpose-built legislation by December 2006. States and Territories reserved the right to use the NPI if the Commonwealth, States and Territories failed to reach agreement on national purpose-built legislation at COAG's next meeting.

COAG agreed as well to the priority areas and sectors for the national adaptation framework which will be presented to COAG at the end of 2006.

COAG also agreed that the Commonwealth and the States and Territories would work in partnership to maximise opportunities for Australia to achieve low emissions outcomes through clean coal and other low emissions technologies. COAG agreed to discuss this issue at its next meeting.

National Water Reform

Governments at the COAG meeting reaffirmed their ongoing commitment to the continuing water reform agenda as expressed in the National Water Initiative (NWI) and agreed that the resources and efforts need to be prioritised to deliver six fundamental reform elements of the NWI:

- conversion of existing water rights into secure and tradable water access entitlements;
- completion of water plans that are consistent with the NWI through transparent processes and using best available science;
- implementation of these plans to achieve sustainable levels of surface and ground water extraction in practice;
- establishment of open and low cost water trading arrangements;
- improvement of water pricing to support the wider water reform agenda; and
- implementation of national water accounting and measurement standards, and adequate systems for measuring, metering, monitoring and reporting on water resources.

COAG noted that interim arrangements are being finalised for greater permanent trading between the three southern Murray-Darling Basin States for buyers and sellers.

COAG also noted that the National Water Commission would be reviewing progress on water trading as of 1 January 2007 and that current plans indicate that a comprehensive system for permanent trade in water entitlements between the southern Murray-Darling Basin States under the NWI should be in place by 1 July 2007. COAG agreed efforts will be made to accelerate the introduction of this system.

COAG further noted the joint communiqué from the 16 June 2006 meeting of water ministers and agreed that water ministers should continue to meet as part of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council to facilitate the collaborative efforts by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to address priority areas on water reform.

COAG reaffirmed the importance of working together to maintain a long-term, strategic view towards securing Australia's water supplies. COAG recognised the impact of the drought and the importance of resolving Australia's urban water problems. To make a lasting contribution to securing Australia's water supply in accord with the NWI, COAG agreed to further discussions between the Commonwealth and States and Territories to ensure that a small number of large projects of state and national significance receive appropriate support from the Australian Government Water Fund.

COAG noted that the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council (MDBMC) has agreed to undertake a review of the *Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1992* by June 2007.

At the COAG meeting, relevant Heads of Government signed agreements previously agreed by the MDBMC that amend:

- the COAG *Intergovernmental Agreement on Addressing Water Overallocation and Achieving Environmental Objectives in the Murray-Darling Basin* following the Commonwealth's \$500 million cash contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission; and
- the *Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1992* to enable improved water business practices, to clarify the original agreement in the matter of limiting Queensland's liability and to other minor changes.

Indigenous Issues

Generational Commitment

COAG agreed that a long-term, generational commitment is needed to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. COAG agreed the importance of significantly closing the gap in outcomes between Indigenous people and other Australians in key areas for action as identified in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators Report* (OID) released by COAG in 2003.

COAG's future work will focus on those areas identified for joint action which have the greatest capacity to achieve real benefits for Indigenous Australians in the short and long term.

COAG has agreed to establish a working group to develop a detailed proposal for generational change including specific, practical proposals for reform which reflect the diversity of circumstances in Australia.

The working group will consider how to build clearer links between the OID framework, the National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians, the COAG Reconciliation Framework and the bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The working group will report back to COAG by December 2006.

Outcomes of the Indigenous Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities

COAG expressed concern that some Indigenous communities suffer from high levels of family violence and child abuse. Leaders agreed that this is unacceptable. Its magnitude demands an immediate national targeted response focused on improving the safety of Indigenous Australians. Despite all jurisdictions having taken steps over recent years to address this problem, improved resourcing and a concerted, long-term joint effort are essential to achieve significant change. COAG understands that these issues exist for Indigenous communities throughout Australia in urban, rural and remote areas.

In June 2004, COAG agreed to the National Framework on Indigenous Family Violence and Child Protection. COAG has reaffirmed its commitment to this National Framework. Leaders also affirmed the need to continue to undertake work addressing all aspects of the underlying causes of family violence and child abuse.

At this meeting, COAG has agreed to adopt a collaborative approach to addressing particularly the issues of policing, justice, support and governance. Bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and States and Territories will be the key to ensuring this proceeds. This approach, which has been informed by the Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities held on 26 June 2006, recognises the differing circumstances in jurisdictions and builds on successful work already being undertaken. It also builds on work by all jurisdictions to implement the principles under the National Framework on Indigenous Family Violence and Child Protection that COAG agreed in June 2004.

The Commonwealth has agreed to make available funds in the order of \$130 million over four years to support national and bilateral actions on the basis that the States and Territories have agreed to complement this effort with additional resources to be negotiated on a bilateral basis.

Policing, community education and support for victims and witnesses

Indigenous Australians must be able to rely on, and have confidence in, the protection of the law. To this end, COAG has agreed to provide more resources for policing in very remote areas where necessary, to improve the effectiveness of bail provisions and to establish a National Indigenous Violence and Child Abuse Intelligence Task Force to support existing intelligence and investigatory capacity. Joint strike teams will be established on a bilateral basis, where necessary, to work in remote Indigenous communities where there is evidence of endemic child abuse or violence. COAG has also agreed to invest in community legal education to ensure Indigenous Australians are informed about their legal rights, know how to access assistance and are encouraged to report incidents of violence and abuse. In addition, more support for victims and witnesses of violence and abuse will be provided.

Application of customary law

The law's response to family and community violence and sexual abuse must reflect the seriousness of such crimes. COAG agreed that no customary law or cultural practice excuses, justifies, authorises, requires, or lessens the seriousness of violence or sexual abuse. All jurisdictions agree that their laws will reflect this, if necessary by future amendment.

Complementary measures

COAG has also agreed to work together to fund and administer complementary measures that address key contributing factors to violence and child abuse in Indigenous communities. One of the main factors is alcohol and substance misuse. Reducing substance misuse can substantially reduce levels of violence and abuse, improve the overall health and wellbeing of Indigenous people, and may also increase educational attainment, household and individual income levels, and reduce crime and imprisonment rates. Many jurisdictions have acted in this area, but more could be done. COAG has agreed to further support communities seeking to control access to alcohol and illicit substances at a local level. States and Territories have agreed to encourage magistrates to make attendance at drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes mandatory as part of bail conditions or sentencing. COAG has also agreed to provide additional resourcing for drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote areas.

Indigenous leaders and organisations also play a vital role in addressing the problem of violence and abuse. COAG has agreed to support networks of Indigenous women and men in local communities so that they can better help people who report incidents of violence and abuse. All governments agreed that sound corporate governance is important for the stability and effective functioning of communities and non-government organisations. All governments agree in principle that they will only fund non-government organisations that are led and managed by fit and proper persons.

Poor child health and educational attainment can also contribute to an intergenerational cycle of social dysfunction. COAG has agreed to an early intervention measure that will improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children living in remote areas by trialling an accelerated roll-out of the Indigenous child health check in high-need regions with locations to be agreed on a bilateral basis. COAG has also agreed that jurisdictions will work together on the important and complex issue of the low rates of school attendance in Indigenous communities, which reduces the future life chances of Indigenous children. All jurisdictions will collect and share truancy data on enrolments and attendance. The Commonwealth will establish a National Truancy Unit to monitor, analyse and report on this data.

Some States and Territories have identified additional areas for collaborative work, which will be pursued bilaterally with the Commonwealth.

Implementation

The overarching bilateral agreements on Indigenous service delivery will be the primary mechanism for implementing the measures. This ensures that tailored approaches can be developed to address the specific needs and recognise the recent initiatives of jurisdictions, regions and communities. COAG has asked the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) to report to the next COAG meeting on the extent to which bail provisions and enforcement take particular account of potential impacts on victims and witnesses in remote communities and to recommend any changes required. COAG has also asked MCEETYA to report to the next COAG meeting on the issue of enforcing compulsory school attendance and detailed arrangements for the establishment of a National Truancy Unit to monitor, analyse

and report on truancy data. Progress on implementation of the action strategy will be reported back to COAG in December 2006.

Report on the National Framework for Reconciliation and Other Matters

COAG considered a report on the National Framework for Reconciliation.

COAG further agreed that Senior Officials will also provide a report in December 2006 covering: progress against the bilateral agreements negotiated under the service delivery framework and actions undertaken by jurisdictions under the preventing violence framework, including actions arising from the Summit.

Lockhart Review

COAG noted that agreement had not yet been reached across jurisdictions on all the 54 recommendations of the Lockhart Review Committee Report. However, COAG agreed that officials would continue to work on those Lockhart Review recommendations of an administrative nature on which there is agreement and report back to COAG by December 2006.

While COAG restated its preference for nationally consistent arrangements, in the absence of national agreement some States and Territories reserved the right to alter the legislation within their own jurisdictions to the extent that is within their power.

Counter-Terrorism

At the 27 September 2005 Special Meeting on Counter-Terrorism, COAG agreed to a broad range of counter-terrorism initiatives. COAG noted that, in relation to national counter-terrorism arrangements, substantial progress has been made in implementing these initiatives. Some initiatives, however, require further development. A further report on the progress of implementing the September 2005 initiatives will be provided to COAG at its next meeting.

COAG noted the progress report on the implementation of measures to strengthen the security of mass passenger transport. COAG agreed that mass passenger transport security will be progressed through the Australian Transport Council (ATC) under the umbrella of the intergovernmental agreement for surface transport security, working with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NCTC).

COAG agreed the closed-circuit television (CCTV) Code of Practice, which is to be applied on a voluntary, risk-managed basis to mass passenger transport systems, in conjunction with other counter-terrorism strategies and arrangements. COAG also agreed that the ongoing management of the CCTV Code of Practice will be the responsibility of the ATC in consultation with the NCTC. COAG noted that the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services will present the national CCTV review, which will inform future work on CCTV, to the NCTC at the end of August.

COAG also agreed to a strategy for promoting public understanding of the national counter-terrorism arrangements with the NCTC overseeing the strategy's implementation.

COAG further noted:

- the progress report on strengthening counter-terrorism laws which highlighted that:-
 - there is still ongoing work, particularly in relation to the implementation of preventative detention orders, and
 - there are some differences in the ACT's preventative detention regime that are not replicated in the Commonwealth model or legislation in other jurisdictions;
- progress on the implementation of the Unified Policing Model (UPM) and agreed that implementation of UPM measures will be well advanced by the end of 2006 and fully implemented by July 2007, noting that Queensland and Western Australia will fully implement as soon as possible thereafter;
- progress on the review on information and intelligence sharing in the aviation sector and agreed that the NCTC will consider the report and its recommendations, including how they may apply to information and intelligence sharing in other security contexts;
- progress in the development of the National Identity Security Strategy;
- the refocused counter-terrorism exercise regime and exercise timetable;
- the progress report on the draft Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Security Strategy, which will be completed by the end of 2006; and
- the progress made with implementing the support measures to the National Emergency Protocol.

Update on COAG's February 2006 Decisions on Health and Skills

COAG agreed on 10 February 2006 to a \$500 million *Australian Better Health Initiative* to promote good health, disease prevention and early intervention. COAG today agreed to strengthen the collaborative focus of the initiative, by reallocating some funding so that activities jointly administered by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories have a total value of \$200 million.

At its 10 February 2006 meeting, COAG agreed as well on a package of measures designed to underpin a genuinely national approach to apprenticeships, training and skills recognition to alleviate skills shortages evident in parts of the economy. COAG considered a progress report on the implementation of these initiatives, and noted that all measures are on track for implementation within the timeframes agreed by COAG.

Temporary Entry and Employment of Skilled Migrants

All governments set the highest priority on training, creating jobs and providing Australians with job opportunities. Governments across Australia are investing in the training needs of Australians through increased training places in the vocational education and training system, creating apprenticeships, school to work transitional programmes, trade schools and better case management. However, record low unemployment levels in Australia mean that from time to time bringing in already skilled workers from other countries is an important strategy to meet the short-term skills needs of the Australian economy.

Leaders noted the 457 Temporary Business (Long Stay) visa subclass arrangements, and agreed that meeting skills needs in this way should not be at the expense of the employment and training of Australians. Under these arrangements employers who sponsor temporary skilled migrants must meet appropriate and consistent Australian standards and demonstrate that they advance the skills of the Australian workforce for example by demonstrating commitment towards training Australians.

COAG agreed that governments will work cooperatively within existing roles and responsibilities to strengthen the integrity of the 457 arrangements, while maintaining the benefits of the temporary skilled migration programme. This includes ensuring smooth access to the programme by employers.

COAG has asked the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (MCIMA) to identify and implement cooperative measures to ensure the effectiveness, fairness and integrity of the temporary skilled migration arrangements, including appropriate and consistent minimum standards. COAG has also requested that MCIMA provide a progress report on these measures to COAG in December 2006.

Other Business

Double Jeopardy

COAG agreed that reform of the rule against double jeopardy is an important criminal law policy reform that merits nationally-consistent treatment.

COAG also agreed that double jeopardy law reform be progressed via a COAG Senior Officials' working group whose membership would include representatives from the officer-level group that supports SCAG, on the basis of recommendations made by the Model Criminal Code Officers' Committee. The working group is to report to SCAG and to COAG by the end of 2006.

The Inter-jurisdictional exchange of Criminal History Information for People working with Children

COAG noted a report from the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference which recommended that further work be progressed by a national working group.

COAG agreed that the most effective way of progressing further work on the inter-jurisdictional exchange of criminal history information for people working or seeking to work with children is for a COAG Senior Officials' working group to be formed whose membership would include a representative from each officer-level group that supports a relevant ministerial council. The working group is also to report to COAG by the end of 2006.

National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security

Leaders noted the importance of addressing extremism, the promotion of violence and intolerance. COAG noted that MCIMA is developing a National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security to address extremism, the promotion of violence and intolerance.

James Hardie Asbestos Compensation

COAG discussed the matter of the tax treatment of the Asbestos Injuries Compensation Fund, and noted that discussions are continuing between the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments.

Daylight Saving Time

COAG noted that New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory will consider synchronising the start and end dates for Daylight Saving Time.

Soccer World Cup Bid

Governments agreed to support Football Federation Australia in any future bid to host the FIFA World Cup.

Local Government

COAG agreed that at its next meeting it will discuss local government funding arrangements.

Next Meeting

COAG indicated its intention to meet again in early 2007.

Attachments

Attachment A: COAG's response to Productivity Commission Report on *Australia's Health Workforce*

Attachment B: Health Workforce: National Professional Registration

Attachment C: Health Workforce: National Accreditation

Attachment D: National Reform Agenda – Human Capital Indicative Outcomes and Associated Progress Measures

Attachment E: National Reform Agenda – COAG Decisions on reducing the Regulatory Burden

Related Documents

- National Action Plan on Mental Health
- National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic
- Report on Progress Against the Framework For Reconciliation 2006
- *Supplementary Intergovernmental Agreement on Addressing Water Overallocation and Achieving Environmental Objectives in the Murray-Darling Basin*
- *Murray-Darling Basin Agreement Amending Agreement 2006*
- CCTV Code of Practice