

MEDIA RELEASE

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Doctors too busy to treat ‘minor ailments’? – Nurses are the solution

With almost daily media reports of doctor shortages and overworked doctors, especially in rural and regional communities, the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is urging all Australian governments to increase the use and deployment of nurses to ensure patients receive the health care they need, when and where they need it.

The Sunday Mail in Queensland reported this week that thousands of Queenslanders are visiting overwhelmed emergency departments for ‘minor ailments’ because they cannot get to see a GP.

ACN CEO, Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN, said today that the situation in Queensland is happening all around the country.

“People should not be forced to wait hours at stressed emergency departments because there are too few GPs or GPs are already overburdened with no time to see new patients – especially those with ‘minor ailments’,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

“For people with a sick child or an elderly parent, no ailment is minor.

“In the Queensland reports, patients were turning up to emergency in large numbers for treatment for wound dressing and stitches, ankle and foot blisters, bruised fingers, ingrown nails, medical certificates, repeat prescriptions, ear infections, sunburn, wrist or hand splinters, and urinary tract infections.

“All of these conditions can be treated – or advice given – by Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners outside the hospital setting in real time.

“Systems must be adapted and updated to keep people out of hospital and take the pressure off GPs.

“For all these pressure points, nurses are the solution.

“Nursing is the largest and most geographically dispersed health profession in Australia. You can find a nurse in rural, regional, and remote communities where there are no other health professionals.

“But nursing, too, has workforce issues.

“We need greater investment in nursing across all States and Territories.

“We also need greater support for overseas-trained nurses to live and work in Australia and stay for the long term to serve local communities.

“And we need incentives to encourage trained nurses who have left nursing for various reasons to return to the workforce.

“Greater and better targeted investment in nursing will allow governments to deliver promises and policies such as 24/7 registered nurses in aged care, Urgent Care Clinics, nurse walk-in clinics, and accessible primary health care in rural and regional communities.

“ACN stands ready to help governments increase and train the nursing workforce, upskill nurses to provide appropriate level care and leadership in all settings – and keep people out of emergency departments and hospital wards when they do not need to be there.

“Nurses working to their full training and capability can take an enormous burden off the system,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

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Notes to Editors:

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurses and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva in collaboration with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF). An organisation not afraid to challenge industry issues affecting the nursing profession or Australia's health care, ACN is a well-connected and educated national body that drives change with people of influence to enhance the delivery of health services to the Australian community. ACN's membership includes nurses in roles of influence, including senior nurses, organisational leaders, academics, and researchers.

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CEO - Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN - Bio



Kylie Ward. Policy Reformer. Nurse. For-Purpose Leader. Equality Warrior. Adjunct Professor. Transformation Specialist.

Kylie is the CEO of Australian College of Nursing. She has led a program of transformation at ACN, which has now become Australia's beacon for Nurse Leadership.

She is a major policy influencer, advocate for women, children and equality.

