

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Unleashing the nursing workforce will improve patient access to quality primary care**

Australian College of Nursing (ACN) CEO, Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN, said today that enabling nurses to work to the full scope of their skills and training would dramatically improve patient access to high quality primary health care where and when they need it.

Welcoming today's announcement that Professor Mark Cormack will lead the *Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce Review*, Adjunct Professor Ward said that nurses, as the largest and most geographically dispersed health workforce in Australia, are poised and perfectly placed to reduce stresses in the health system and improve timely access to vital primary health care.

"Nurses have the skills and experience to work independently of GPs, who we know are overworked and too few in number to meet growing patient demand," Adjunct Professor Ward said.

"We are hearing almost daily reports that our medical colleagues are too busy to see patients who need wound dressings, ear infections, urinary tract infections, and other conditions that are well within the scope of practice of Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners.

"These patients should not be turning up at already overstressed emergency departments.

"Nurses can and should be supported to independently consult and treat these patients and others with more complex conditions.

"Advancing the scope of nursing practice would enable greater medical availability for Australian communities, especially in rural, regional, and remote Australia where nurses are often the only highly qualified health professionals available to see patients in person in real time.

"Nurses can monitor care, change treatment approaches quicker, and work with patients to ensure treatment plans are followed.

"Nurse practitioners have been prescribing for a long time, working alongside doctors to ensure safe and quality health services.

"This frees up doctor time, reduces the risk of treatment dropout rates, and eases pressure on hospitals.

“Nurses are not a threat to doctors. We are an underutilised resource to help improve patient access to the care they need.

“We are here to help. Nurses are the solution.”

Adjunct Professor Ward said that the ageing Medicare funding system is not fit for purpose to support all health professionals work to their full scope of practice.

“Change is overdue and urgently needed,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

“ACN is actively advocating for changes to Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) funding to enable greater access for Australians to quality health care.

“There are currently only nine MBS items available for Nurse Practitioners, which is critically inadequate to maximise the capacity of highly trained nurses to support patient treatment, monitoring, and recovery.

“Extending nursing access to more MBS items is crucial to improve patient primary care, take the pressure off stressed and overworked GPs, ease demand on hospital emergency departments, and create more rewarding and fulfilling career pathways for more health professionals and professions.

“It will help build a stronger health workforce to meet ever-growing patient and community demand – and strengthen and modernise Medicare.

“ACN is enthusiastic about ongoing engagement with Professor Cormack and the Review processes,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

**For more information:**

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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.