

Changes needed to tackle chronic diseases: expert

Changes are crucial to ensure better care for Australians suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma and cancer, according to an academic visiting Canberra.

An ageing population meant chronic disease was becoming an important focus in health care, Professor Christopher Dowrick, a visiting fellow at the Australian National University's primary health-care research institute, said.

More funding, health workers and systemic reform were required if the national chronic disease strategy was to deliver better care.

The strategy — to care for patients with chronic conditions and prevent these diseases in Australia — was endorsed by Australian health ministers last year.

A practising GP and editor of *Chronic Illness* journal, Professor Dowrick said the strategy was a good foundation but would only work well with a "substantial amount of thought about resource implications across the board".

"The chronic disease strategy could have substantial implications for primary care in Australia, including a more multidisciplinary team approach and a shift in GP payment methods from a fee-for-service to a managed care model.

"The strategy's incorporation of mental health with other chronic disease is a particularly good element of this model."

Professor Dowrick, from the University of Liverpool, said decision makers had to break down the barriers that could hamper the flow of funding and information.

"It's not only about resource allocation at a state or federal level, it should also be about proper resource allocation in funding general practice to offer this care for patients of chronic disease.

"Given the right setting and viewing the strategy as a long-term plan, it could be an effective tool in improving the health care of Australians with chronic disease in the future."

— Danielle Cronin