

The Accountability Report

Health Minister Greg Hunt's legacy: reports, reviews, inquiries and evaluations ignored, and implementation of plans



At the end of 46th Parliament, the Minister for Health and Ageing Greg Hunt announced his retirement. He has held this ministerial position for five years and 97 days; only Dr Michael Wooldridge (five years and 260 days) and Dr Neal Blewett (seven years and 24 days) have been Health Minister for longer. What is Hunt's legacy, and how could this be measured?

Arguably the key feature of his tenure is the opportunities foregone for meaningful reforms to better integrate Australia's fractured healthcare system and align it with population needs in the 21st century, as brutally exposed by the pandemic. Put bluntly, that translates as someone who has too often been able to find an excuse for delaying decision-making and who has endlessly resorted to the need for further advice, committees and taskforces, even in the face of mountains of reports, evidence and recommendations.

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To demonstrate this point, I decided to make a compilation of reports, inquiries, evaluations, plans strategies and advisory groups that have delivered information and recommendations and imperatives for action over the life of the 46th Parliament. They are presented, with some brief assessments of the attention paid to them, in the table below.

I am quite sure this compilation is incomplete but serves to make the point that the next person to hold this Cabinet position will be confronted with volumes of recommendations from experts about what must be done, and an enormous pile of unfinished business left by their predecessor.

I am very grateful for the diligent assistance of Dr Anny Huang in compiling this table.
- Associate Professor Lesley Russell

Reports / Reviews / Studies / Evaluations / Inquiries

Date of commission / announcement	Topic of report / review / study	Brief description	Current status	Recommendations / conclusions	Outcome / eventual action
October 2017 (note this was 45th Parliament but included because still relevant)	Phase 1 Private Health Insurance (PHI) reforms	To simplify PHI, reduce costs (with underlying driver of increasing number of people with PHI)	Phase 1 complete (see Phase 2 provisions announced May 2021)	Classification of PHI into tiers; discounts for younger people; increased powers for PHI Ombudsman	Implemented. Outcomes yet to be evaluated.
January 2018 (note this was the 45th Parliament)	Ministerial Advisory Committee on Out-of-Pocket Costs	Part of Hunt's 2017 announcement of a package of reforms to simplify PHI and reduce patients' costs.	Final report delivered to Government in late 2018. March 2019 announced action on all recommendations.	Recommendations for a website with average fee information and a public education campaign.	Medical Cost Finder website launched; has little credibility among doctors and patients.
May 2021-22 Budget announcement	Phase 2 PHI reforms	Background information here	No reports publicly available. Note Phase 3 reforms touted on DoH website	Extension of age for inclusion of young people on parental policy; actuarial studies.	Largely implemented; quarterly reports here . Outcomes yet to be evaluated.
October 2018	Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety	Background information here .	Completed, final report issued on 26/02/2021 (See Advisory groups)	148 recommendations made; Government response here .	28/02/22: Hunt announced significant progress has been made as part of 5-year aged care reform plan, with a total funding of >\$18.3 billion. Public concerns about adequacy of response.
Final report released November 2018	Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health	Background information here .	Final report delivered to Government 30/06/2020, publicly released 16/11/2020. National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan (May 2021) and Vision 2030 (March 2022) enable implementation.	24 detailed recommendations. Government responses here .	\$2.3b in 2021-22 Budget for NPAs with States and Territories + \$648.6b in 2022-23 Budget. Experts have criticised ad hoc, inadequate response. Mental health workforce strategy still in development (was due end of 2021).

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Initiative announced August 2019	Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study	4 national surveys over 3 years covering health (including mental health) and wellbeing across the country; \$90 million funding; ABS commissioned to complete survey.	Part 1 (National Study on Mental Health and Wellbeing) completed; remaining surveys to follow.	Initial results from Part 1 announced 08/12/2021.	Results will inform Australia's Long Term National Health Plan.
Evaluation announced October 2019	Evaluation of Primary Health Network After Hours Program	DoH commissioned external consultancy, Health Policy Analysis, to undertake evaluation, assessing progress to date of the PHN After Hours Program after its initial commencement in 2015 (this program itself was a result of a review of A/H care in 2015),	Evaluation completed in November 2020, final report released in May 2021.	12 recommendations made in final report.	Unclear whether any of recommendations have been / are in the process of being implemented.
Review announced March 2020	Review of Dorothy Henderson Lodge COVID-19 Outbreak	Report by Prof Lyn Gilbert; very rapidly commissioned by the DoH during outbreak.	Concluded on 14/04/2020, final report released to general public on 25/08/2020.	No specific recommendations; major discussions and major lessons discussed in report.	Key learnings influenced future responses to aged care facility outbreaks; unclear if there was a higher level policy response.
Review announced June 2020	Newmarch House COVID-19 Outbreak Independent Review	Undertaken by Prof Lyn Gilbert and A/Prof Alan Lilly over a period of 6 weeks.	Final report on 20/08/2020, released to general public on 24/08/2020.	Summary of Key Learnings (20 in total) in report, no specific recommendations	Key learnings influenced future responses to aged care facility outbreaks; unclear if there was a higher level policy response.
Inquiry announced August 2020	Inquiry into approvals processes for new drugs and novel medical technologies in Australia ("The New Frontier ")	Conducted by the Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport (a House of Representatives Committee) with Trent Zimmerman MP as Chair	Final report tabled on 25/11/2021	31 recommendations in final report	No Government response documents online, unclear about implementation of recommendations. Could inform National Medicines Policy.
Review announced September 2020	Independent review of COVID-19 outbreaks at St Basil's and Epping Gardens aged care facilities.	Undertaken by Prof Lyn Gilbert and A/Prof Alan Lilly over a period of 10 weeks.	Final report on 30/11/2020, released to general public 21/12/2021.	Considerations, Key Learnings and Conclusions in report, no specific recommendations.	Key learnings influenced future responses to aged care facility outbreaks; unclear if there was a higher level policy response.
Review announced December 2020	Independent Review of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities	Led by Prof Lyn Gilbert and Prof Alan Lilly, review commissioned to add to knowledge from previous facility-specific outbreak reviews.	Concluded, final report published on 01/11/2021.	All 38 recommendations accepted by the Australian Government on 21/11/2021.	Unclear what recommendations are being implemented. Specific COVID-19 funding for aged care in 2022-23 Budget.
Announced May 2021	Prostheses List Reforms	Announced in 2021-22 Budget, with \$22m to fund the effort.	IHPA presented final report Benchmark Price for Prostheses in Australian Public Hospitals 2020-21 April 2022.	DoH will use report to establish new reference pricing and streamline approvals processes.	MOU btwn DoH and MTAA signed March 2022. Little transparency re ability to deliver reduced costs for patients.
Announced July 2021	National Medicines Policy Review	Initially planned for 6 months, with an Expert Advisory Committee appointed to undertake the review; first review since the policy was implemented in 2000.	Initial consultation period Aug -Oct 2021; Hunt announced 24/03/2022 final report to be deferred until after election.	Pending	Pending



Date of commission / announcement	Topic of report / review / study	Brief description	Current status	Recommendations / conclusions	Outcome / eventual action
Exact date in 2021 is unclear.	Evaluation of the COAG Section 19(2) Exemptions Initiative – Improving Access to Primary Care in Rural and Remote Areas	Assessment of provision that allows hospitals in rural and remote areas to bill Medicare for primary care services.	Evaluation undertaken by DoH contractor. Final report released 14/10/2022.	Exemptions improve access to primary care and A/H care but there are inequalities. Recommendations for clearer objectives and redesign of funding mechanism.	Presumably an issue for Health Ministers.
Exact date is unclear.	Final evaluation of Health Care Homes initiative	HCH initiative announced March 2016 In Dec 2018 extended to June 2021. Final evaluation by external consultancy.	Interim evaluation reports from 2019 and 2020 not very positive.	Pending - due February 2022.	DoH website “Evaluation results and lessons learned will be used to inform future primary care reform.”
Announced March 2022	Vision 2040 Strategy	Australia’s health and medical research strategy for the next 2 decades.	Strategic Advisory Committee named, headed by Dr Katherine Woodthorpe.	Pending	Pending
Review announced September 2021. Reference Committee announced April 2022.	Health Technology Assessment Policy and Methods Review	This is part of Strategic Agreement with the Medicines Industry 2022-27 , signed Sept 2021.	The appointment of the Reference Committee, chaired by Dr Peter Boxall, was announced on DoH website 10/04/2022 during the Government caretaker period. Labor has rejected this. Expect Zimmerman report to inform review.	Yet to meet	The extent to which the recommendations from the 2009 HTA review have been implemented is unclear.
MBS Review Taskforce established in 2015. Exact date of decision to continue this work is unclear.	Continuing MBS Review	To provide continuous review of and advice on items in the Medicare Benefits Schedule. Scope of work unclear.	Final report published 14/12/2020 New MBS Review Advisory Committee established Sept 2021 (see Advisory Groups).	In addition to many recommendations for largely technical changes to MBS items, final report offers advice about reforms of primary care.	Many recommended changes have been made; others have been rejected by medical specialties.
PHNs established July 2015. Annual reviews required.	PHN performance against Performance and Quality Framework	DoH assesses performance of PHNs every 12 months to check they are meeting program’s objectives, helping to improve health care in their regions.	These annual reports not publicly available. Last public evaluation was 2018.	ANAO plan to conduct an audit of DOH management of PHNs in 2021-2022 apparently did not eventuate.	Effectiveness of PHNs role in improving local health outcomes is unknown.
Announced 2021 as part of Refresh Closing the Gap.	Productivity Commission Closing the Gap review	Productivity Commission to do review every three years – this is the first.	Terms of Reference announced April 2022 Consultation process is underway. Final report due December 2023.	Pending	Pending



Plans and Strategies

Date of launch / announcement	Topic / scope of plan	Brief description	Current status	Outcome / eventual action
Ongoing	Stronger Rural Health Strategy 2018-2028	To improve the health of people in rural Australia through the supply of a quality health workforce that is distributed across the country according to community need	Changes to boost medical education and training in rural areas have been boosted. Focused on doctors and nurses. Rural health organisations are pushing for updated strategy (see NRHA)	Commitment is to deliver 3,000 extra doctors and 3,000 extra nurses by 2028.
14/08/2019	Australia's Long Term National Health Plan	To chart the way forward over the next 3 and 10 years in the key areas of mental health, primary care, hospitals, preventive health and medical research.	Published, with various actions arising from the Plan in progress	No way to currently assess progress against stated priorities.
Initial announcement to develop plan in Aug 2019; Public consultation period 13/10/2021 to 09/11/2021; Final report released 29/03/2021	Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022 - 2032	Part of Australia's Long Term National Health Plan; final report groups "ambitions for primary health care into three broad streams" and also focuses on telehealth and a system of voluntary patient registration with general practices.	Final report released without fanfare as part of 2022-23 Budget. Implementation Oversight Group being established.	Evaluation framework to be developed in 2022; whole-of-plan evaluations to take place in Year 3, Year 6 and Year 9. 2020-2021 budget included \$50.7m to prepare for a "MyGP" registration system; MYEFO in Dec 2021 had \$106m / 4 yrs for telehealth services initially set up during pandemic.
Announced 12/06/2019; Steering Group established Sept 2019. Final plan released 12/06/2022.	National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030.	Strategy lists Aims, Principles, Enablers and Focus Areas; targets given are too amorphous to be measurable. Focus is very clinical.	Blueprint for action to be developed.	2022-23 Budget included \$30.1m / 4 yrs for initiatives under the strategy.
Launched 15/12/2021	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031	Plan drives progress on the 3 health targets of new national agreement on Closing the Gap.	To be delivered in partnership with Indigenous communities.	Actions to address plan and new consultative approach yet to be demonstrated.
Due 2022	Update of National Digital Health Strategy issued in 2017 and Framework for Action issued July 2018.	Ensuring digital information is used to improve health and wellbeing, deliver safe and high quality services, support the healthcare system.	Community consultation underway. Note there are some responsibilities here for States and Territories.	2017 plan outlined 44 activities for delivery by 2022. Realities are less than promised. Digital divide and access to NBN are significant issues.
National Plans and Strategies that are the responsibility of the Federal and State and Territory Health Ministers				
May 2020	National Health Reform Agreement (2020 - 2025 addendum)	An agreement between the Commonwealth and State governments on funding for public hospitals; also 6 long-term health reforms.	Agreement came into effect on 1 July 2020	The Commonwealth is supposed to contribute "about \$133.6 billion" btwn July 2020 and June 2025 for public hospital services: no information on current figure to date. National Health Reform Agreement Long Term Reforms Roadmap endorsed by all State / Territory governments on 17/09/2021 - no information on current progress against Roadmap.



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March 2022	National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032	10-year framework for action to prevent, reduce, and treat, overweight and obesity in Australia.	Next steps not clear, implementation unlikely to be driven by a federal Coalition Government.	Not a priority for Morrison Government. No resources provided to date.
December 2021	National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021-2031	Key priorities include collaboration on medical workforce planning and design; rebalancing the supply and distribution of doctors across specialties and locations; reforming medical training pathways.	Next steps not clear.	Healthcare workforce a key issue on the election agenda.
February 2016	Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024 Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives: Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024	Plan aims to improve oral health status and reduce burden of poor oral health.	Performance Monitoring Baseline Report 2017 is here . Huge and growing waiting lists for public dental care services.	2022-2023 Budget extended NPA on Public Dental Services for Adults for one year at current funding levels.
March 2022	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031	Supersedes National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2016-2023 . Combines a refreshed strategic framework and implementation plan in one document.	Plan's target is to increase Indigenous employment in health workforce to 3.43% over next decade.	Partnership with NACCHO and sustained resources will be critical. Labor has made an election commitment to train additional 500 Aboriginal Health Workers.



Advisory groups

Date of commission / announcement	Topic / focus / scope of advisory group	Brief description	Current status	Recommendations / conclusions	Outcome / eventual action
October 2019	Primary Health Reform Steering Group	Tasked to oversee the development of the Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan (see "Plans" table)	Final report released in March 2022 - unclear if there are ongoing actions for this group	Unknown	Unknown
September 2021	Medicare Benefits Schedule Continuous Review Advisory Committee	Set up to continue work done 2015-2020 by MBS Review Taskforce.	In operation	Recommendations made since October 2020 are published here .	Government response to recommendations are published on website , and on MBS Online .
November 2021	National Aged Care Advisory Council	(Established in response to Aged Care RC) Expert panel to advise the Commonwealth aged care reform (expected to take place over 5 years)	In operation	Ongoing Communiqués published regularly.	Ongoing
December 2021	Health Research Impact Committee of NHMRC	New Principal Committee of the NHMRC, chaired by Prof Emily Banks; all other Principal Committees have also had members appointed for the next 3-year term	In operation, current term 2021 - 2024	Ongoing	Ongoing
December 2021	Aged Care Council of Elders	(Established in response to the Royal Commission on Aged Care) Group of 14 prominent senior citizens to represent senior Australians to guide the government's 5-year aged care reform	In operation, meeting 6 times per year (last meeting in March 2022)	Ongoing advice as the reform progresses	Ongoing, documented in online meeting minutes
March 2022	Strategic Advisory Committee to develop the Vision 2040 Strategy	Headed by Dr Katherine Woodthorpe, focusing on Australia's health and medical research strategy for the next 2 decades	Committee members named, advisory group active	Pending	Pending

Compiled by Associate Professor Lesley Russell.
We welcome additions and corrections.

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