

NEWS

GPs and Labor at odds over immunisation

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The federal government's decision to scrap payments encouraging GPs to immunise children is a threat to public health "of the highest order", doctors say.

Labor cut \$83.5 million over four years from the practice incentives program (PIP) in Tuesday's budget.

This includes scrapping payments for doctors who chase up parents and immunise their kids.

Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said the incentive was no longer needed because from July parents will have to immunise their children in order to receive welfare payments.

"This will encourage maximum coverage," she said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Because of these new requirements it is no longer necessary to provide an additional incentive to doctors to meet immunisation targets."

Ms Plibersek said scrapping the immunisation payments was not expected to have any impact on vaccination rates.

But the Australian Medical Association isn't convinced.

AMA president Steve Hambleton said the decision "is a public health risk of the highest order" and he is urgently seeking discussions with Ms Plibersek.

"Australia is a world leader in childhood immunisation rates but this decision could undermine that reputation and undo a lot of hard work by parents, GPs and other health professionals," he said in a statement.

Other changes to the PIP announced on Tuesday mean doctors will now have to carry out cervical screens on 70 per cent of eligible female patients, up from 65 per cent, to be paid a bonus.

Targets for GPs to receive the diabetes incentive will jump from 40 to 50 per cent of diabetics.

The government also said practices would only receive payments for encouraging people to use electronic health records if they themselves formally agreed to participate in the new e-health system.

Dr Hambleton said: "This is not a requirement it's a threat."

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