

# KEY MESSAGES

## REFinE-PHC: Preferences and Choice in Primary Care

---

July 2016

---

Goodall S, Kenny P, Mu C, Hall J, Norman R, Cumming J, Street D, Greene J. and the REFinE Team

---

### Policy context

The Australian health care system presents multiple choices, whether it be consumers selecting if and where to seek care, or providers determining where and how to practice. Studying choice provides important insights which will inform the development of policy, allow prediction of policy effects, and support public performance reporting. Understanding the important factors that influence consumer choice of primary care will help develop policies aimed at encouraging continuity of primary care. Another important aspect of primary health care policy relates to the availability of sufficient GP services and ensuring the availability of these services across both rural and urban areas. This is particularly important given Australia's uneven distribution of services between rural and urban areas, along with the increasing demand for primary care services due to the ageing population.

### Key messages

- > Australians are sensitive to increasing costs for GP visits. Access to bulk billing is important.
- > Quality of care is also important, particularly being seen by a GP they know, and good communication. Knowing their GP uses proven treatment was also nominated as important, but this is difficult for consumers to judge.
- > Being able to get an appointment within 1-2 days was also considered important.
- > Alternatives to face-to-face consultations, such as email or telephone consultations, were not rated highly. This may reflect lack of familiarity with how such services could work.
- > Different styles of practice appeal to different people. This could be used to target different consumer groups, rather than attempting to have 'one size fits all' in the provision of care.
- > Quality information did influence consumers' choice of GP. The way this information is provided is important. For example, the combination of a numeric and graphical presentation was preferred over either alone and less error prone than a numeric presentation alone.
- > Almost half of GPs and half of hospital doctors, particularly those working long hours, wish to reduce their working hours. Ensuring appropriate working hours is an important consideration in designing service delivery and workforce planning.
- > Younger GPs are more likely to live and work in rural areas compared to GPs in their forties. This may reflect changing family responsibilities. Ensuring career paths allow this could be important in an adequate rural workforce.

The research reported in this paper is a project of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute, which is supported by a grant from the Australian Government Department of Health under the Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Strategy. The information and opinions contained in it do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Australian Government Department of Health.