

OPTIMISING ACCESS TO BEST PRACTICE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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POLICY CONTEXT

Ensuring that Australians have access to health care is an integral component of Australian health care policy. Growing awareness of the importance of primary health care (PHC) in delivering equitable and cost-effective care is creating interest in better understanding and addressing access to best practice PHC. This review examines evidence from the published literature on potential interventions to enhance access to 'best practice' PHC suitable for implementation in the Australian PHC system.

KEY FINDINGS

- Access is the dynamic balance between health services need and use of health services and is continually negotiated between users and providers of health care.
 - Factors associated with access to best practice PHC affect both providers and users of PHC and can be grouped into patient, organisational, financial, workforce, and geographical factors. Few papers explored interactions between factors or ways in which providers' and patients' prioritise decisions about access to PHC.
 - Interventions to enhance access to best practice PHC largely addressed provider side issues and included reorganisation of practice, systems to support and prompt practitioners, external support financial incentives, workforce development and geographic strategies. On the patient side strategies comprised patient support and social marketing campaigns.
 - Effective evaluated interventions had the following elements:
 - inclusion of multiple strategies, eg patient support, workforce development and a geographical strategy
 - incorporation of strategies into usual practice, eg call/recall systems and outreach
 - financial incentives, e.g. reduced cost or free service and transport vouchers for patients
 - ongoing education and building of awareness among patients and practitioners.
 - There was a fairly strong match between factors identified as influencing access to best practice PHC and effective strategies.
 - The approach taken to define and describe access opens up new way of thinking about the balance between provision and use of health services. The results of this review indicate that access and its measurement need to be developed further and there are a number of areas in which there would be scope for improving access to best practice primary health care.
- For more details, go to the [three page report](#)

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