

KEY MESSAGES

Information sharing for the management of chronic conditions in primary health care: *How does it work and what are the outcomes?*

February 2012

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Policy context

The prevalence of chronic health problems is increasing across Australia. Finding ways to maximise effective use of resources in this area is particularly important given that expenditure on chronic conditions already accounts for the majority of all health care spending. Prior research indicates that chronic health problems are most effectively managed through a collaborative approach where clients and health workers from various disciplines work together to achieve defined goals. The use of care plans can assist in facilitating this collaboration and in fostering effective communication. To address the gaps in knowledge about how these processes are currently operating, our research investigated the information sharing processes that are used within the care planning process to identify how they work and to explore client and health worker experiences of them.

Key messages

The findings revealed several enablers and barriers to information sharing which impacted on the effectiveness of chronic condition management. To be most effective, information sharing should be open, two-way and inclusive of all members of health care teams, including clients and carers. Information sharing must also only be undertaken with appropriate consent otherwise this has the potential to cause clients harm. Issues of consent were also identified as central barriers, however, particularly in situations where health workers lacked understanding about what they had consent to share and where clients were not able to provide selective consent to maintain privacy. Funding systems also impeded collaboration by requiring the development of multiple care plans for a client so that each health worker could receive funding for the care that they provide. The following areas should be addressed to facilitate a more effective approach to chronic condition management.

- > Consistent guidelines are required to clarify what information health workers can share if they have full consent.
- > The option for clients to provide selective consent should be mandatory.
- > Medicare funding should be provided on the basis of effective care plan use.
- > Medicare Locals should identify areas of service overlap and communication breakdown between services in their regions and work with services to address these issues.
- > An expanded care planning role for practice nurses should be considered to allow them to play a case management role in order to facilitate the collaboration of multidisciplinary teams and to provide greater capacity for supporting client self-management.

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 and Ageing 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 and Ageing.