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National plan to help health workforce better manage patients' pain launched

In a first for Australian healthcare, national pain education standards are being developed to help the health workforce gain the skills they need to help people better manage chronic and acute pain.

The standards are a key part of the new *National Strategy for Health Practitioner Pain Management Education* which will be launched by the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FPM) of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists at its Spring Meeting in Adelaide on 6 October.

The strategy provides a five-to-10 year roadmap to help Australia's health workforce better target patients' needs in the assessment and treatment of pain.

The Australian government funded the faculty to develop the strategy after broad consultation with consumers, students and health practitioners based on extensive research and a review of existing health education resources.

The pain education standards are the first step in improving pain education for Australian health practitioners, particularly during their undergraduate training.

The standards are aimed at health practitioners, such as medical practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, occupational therapists, First Nations health workers and aged care workers.

Dr Kieran Davis, FPM Dean, said the standards would help ensure Australians living with chronic pain receive pain treatment appropriate to their needs.

Pain is the most common reason why Australians seek health care.

"It has never been more urgent for health professionals to be educated in the most effective assessment and treatment of pain," Dr Davis said.

"With one in five Australians aged 45 and over living with chronic pain it is essential that all healthcare professionals have a good understanding on how pain is best managed."

According to a 2019 Deloitte report *The cost of pain in Australia*, the social and financial burden to individuals and their families is significant, costing the Australian economy nearly \$140 billion a year.

“Equipping our health care workers with the skills and knowledge to manage individuals with pain will assist in reducing this burden,” Dr Davis said.

Dr Davis said the development of the national strategy began in 2020 and despite the challenges of COVID lockdowns and travel restrictions, an extensive cross-section of stakeholders were consulted with their valuable input shaping the strategy.

For more information or to request interviews, please contact ANZCA Media Manager Carolyn Jones on +61 3 8517 5303, +61 408 259 369 or cjones@anzca.edu.au.