

Survey of Australian Physicians Reveals Concerns with Government Intrusion in Health Care Decisions

A survey of physicians in Australia, particularly those who treat complex conditions like cancer, HIV, and diabetes, finds they are frustrated with the limited choice in medicines, hindering their ability to provide the best possible care to their patients. Findings from this survey demonstrate why the U.S. government should not import other countries' health care policies. Four topics were considered in the survey: patient access to treatments, government influence in the practice of medicine, physicians' flexibility and autonomy, and investment in research and development.

Australia's single-payer national health insurance system leaves many patients without access to life-saving medicines. The government's emphasis on managing health care costs comes at the expense of patients' quality of care.

Patient Access to Innovative Medicines

Patients in Australia have limited access to innovative treatments, resulting in poorer health outcomes for conditions where medicine play an important role in treatment. For example, between 2010 and 2014, the five-year survival rate for pediatric brain cancer was more than 11 percentage points lower in Australia than the United States.¹



4 out of 5 Australian physicians say their government rations health care to control spending.

81%

of Australian physicians agree patients would benefit from access to more innovative medicines.

Just 2%

of Australian physicians say patients can access innovative medicines without restrictions.

"If someone has got B-RAF mutant [cancer]...there is no way that I can give immunotherapy up front to that patient, even though I know that that is the better thing to do." -Australian Oncologist

The Role of Government in the Practice of Medicine

Through its pharmaceutical benefit scheme (PBS) the Australian government has significant say over which innovative drugs will be made available on the national formulary.



75%: Three quarters of Australian physicians say the government has equal or greater influence over health care decisions compared to providers and patients.



1%: Just 1% of physicians say health care decisions are completely directed by providers and patients.

"[B]ecause of the involvement of government and restrictions and guidelines... it's a bit challenging to well, sometimes more than a bit, to figure out exactly which patient qualifies for what and, you know, to go through the paperwork of getting that sorted." -Australian Neurologist

Physician Flexibility and Autonomy

As part of its national health system, the Australian government plays a significant role in determining which treatments are available to patients, including through the national formulary. These government-level decisions exert significant influence over the course of a patient's health care.

68%

More than two thirds of Australian physicians have been unable to prescribe the best clinical option within the last year.



4 out of 5 Australian physicians say guidelines and regulations sometimes, often, or always prevent them from providing the best treatment.

59%

of Australian physicians have had multiple patients travel abroad to gain access to a treatment.

“I disagree [with government decisions] often because I want to use the medication, you know, which is shown to be of benefit and is a standard care in the United States and I can't use it.” -Australian Hematologist

Research and Development (R&D)

90%

The majority of Australian physicians believe their government should increase investment in medicine R&D.



4 out of 5 Australian physicians say their country trails the United States in biomedical R&D.

“For research and development, I think America leads in leaps and bounds there compared with all the countries.” -Australian Oncologist

Survey Methodology: Health Strategies Insights by EVERSANA conducted a 20-minute online survey with 100 Australian physicians, fielded 11/11-12/03/2019, and 30-minute telephone interviews with 6 Australian physicians between 9/19-9/20/2019. Survey targeted clinical specialists (hematologists, oncologists, immunologists, neurologists, rheumatologists, and endocrinologists) with at least 5 years of clinical practice in Australia, who treat a minimum number of patients per month based on their specialty, are affiliated with an academic institution or are involved in clinical trials as part of their practice, are up-to-date on the latest advances in their specialty, and are knowledgeable about the Australian process for assessing cost effectiveness, pricing and reimbursement process for new drugs.

Sources:

- 67.1% in Australia vs. 78.2% in U.S.; C Allemani, et al. “Global surveillance of trends in cancer survival 2000-14 (CONCORD-3): analysis of individual records for 37 513 025 patients diagnosed with one of 18 cancers from 322 population-based registries in 71 countries,” The Lancet, 2018. 391(10125): 1023-1075.