Health Minister Dr Chris Burns will meet State and Territory health ministers in Sydney today, ahead of tomorrow's Australian Health Minister's Conference.

Dr Burns said today’s meeting would discuss a report presented to the Commonwealth last month which questions whether the Federal Government is directing money to where it is most needed in the health system.

The report - Caring for Our Health? Fairness and Australian Government Spending - was produced by the eight State and Territory health ministers.

The report examines the Australian Government’s funding of general practitioners, specialists, public hospitals, medicines and private health insurance. It also poses questions about the future of the health system.

“To date, there has been no response from the Commonwealth,” Dr Burns said.

“This is a crucial issue to Territorians, who know we have a shortage of GPs, especially bulkbilling GPs.

“The provision of these frontline services is an Australian Government responsibility, yet the report finds there are not enough GPs in rural or remote areas.

“In the Territory, this lack of GPs puts an unnecessary burden on our health system – particularly our NT public hospitals.”

The report also shows that at a national level, the Commonwealth’s contribution to public hospital funding has fallen from 44 per cent in 1998/99 to 37 per cent in 2005/06.

Dr Burns said he would be raising the issue of GP shortages and lack of access to Medicare services when he meets Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott after the Australian Health Minister's Conference on Tuesday.

“Medicare is supposed to be a universal healthcare system,” Dr Burns said.

“But Territorians are disadvantaged compared to the rest of Australia because of a lack of access to medical and specialist services, particularly in rural and remote areas.”
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