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A national Primary Health Care Mental Health Policy and Action Plan even better for 'Better Access'

The Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] is urging the Federal Government to maintain its positive momentum in the mental health sector and to provide for the nation a *Primary Health Care Mental Health Policy and Action Plan*.

Following the release today of the Federal Government's evaluation of the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule* initiative [Better Access], AGPN Chair, Dr Emil Djakic said that clearly the path to improving mental health services is making inroads but the complete map for mental health services needs to be created.

"A clear direction on mental health services within the primary health care sector is what's needed and that will come from a *National Primary Health Care Mental Health Policy and Action Plan*," Dr Djakic said.

"A National Action Plan will help to address the shortfalls in programs like Better Access, in which a number of populations were identified as missing out including: young people; men; those living in rural and remote areas; and those from a high socio-economic disadvantage.

"It's encouraging to know that over a three year period from 2007 to 2009 over two million people received more than 11 million mental health services through Better Access. However, this program is clearly limited in its coverage across Australia and for certain population groups.

"The shortfall in this program has been its focus on fee-for-service. Broadening mental health services to multidisciplinary, team-based models of care, that are less reliant upon fee-for service programs, will expand the community's access and choice of mental health services.

"Critical to this multidisciplinary approach is ensuring the programs are flexible and cater for the more intensive mental health services right down to the services that offer support or early intervention programs that can reduce the intensity of mental health problems.

"This is about innovative models of care that can be locally managed, adapted and coordinated for local populations through Medicare Locals. A 'one size fits all' mental health service is not appropriate but a responsive, tailored and coordinated system will fit nicely.

"Medicare Locals have been assigned to deliver locally responsive and community-driven health services, including preventative and early intervention programs. A national Action Plan will complement the local programs with the national ambition to improve mental health services," Dr Djakic said.

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