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Primary health care organisations the smart way to improve our health system

A bias in the Australian health system which disadvantages patients will be overcome by the establishment of primary health care organisations (PHCOs), Australian General Practice Network Chair Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"Australians are getting sicker and being hospitalised more often than residents of many developed nations because of the imbalance between the hospital and non-hospital sectors in this country," Dr Djakic said.

Dr Djakic said while hospitals had been built up over time, general practice and other primary health care services had been underfunded and under-recognised.

"Many of the challenges faced by our hospital system are due to the lack of a coordinated, joined-up general practice and primary health care sector. PHCOs will help right this wrong," he said.

Responding to the Prime Minister's announcement PHCOs as the other major pillar in the proposed National Health and Hospital Network, Dr Djakic said PHCOs will have a major role in focusing on promoting health, preventing illness, and reducing avoidable hospital admissions.

"We can't just keep doing more of the same - we need to change, to do things smarter, and primary health care organisations are the smart way of doing things better..

"It's about time Australia got on board and caught up those countries which have already established health systems based on general practice care - in line with international evidence of better outcomes and cost-effective care," he said.

He said the general practice network is ready and willing to take on this new role as the primary health care organisations of the future

"We are delighted that the government has recognised the value of the network and has agreed to support the recommendation from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission that evolving our Network is the logical foundation for the new PHCO system," he said.

Dr Djakic said in the relatively short time of its existence the Network had undergone considerable transformation to well-connected and entrenched in general practice and is ready for the next stage in its evolution

'By establishing a separate network, with strong clinical leadership and quarantined funding, the primary health care sector has the opportunity to be built up and strengthened over time. What we need for a high performing health system are two strong pillars - the primary health care sector, facilitated by PHCOs, and the hospital sector, managed by Local Hospital Networks.

"These two pillars of our health system need to be equally as strong, and must work together to ensure the right decisions are made about the right treatment and in the right place and time," he said.

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