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A primary health care system for mental health, primarily the way to go

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) says developing a comprehensive *primary care* mental health system that operates outside of the hospital system will help to deliver the mental health services needed locally across Australia.

During Mental Health Week (October 10-16) AGPN Chair, Dr Emil Djakic says the health care reforms on offer will boost the primary health care sector tremendously through the establishment of Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCOs), or 'Medicare Locals' as described by the Federal Government, and in turn produce effective mental health services.

"The emphasis on acute, hospital-centric care for the mental health sector is increasingly inappropriate for the broad range of mental health services needed in Australia," Dr Djakic said.

"PHCOs will be in a position to action mental health care plans and services in far more timely and responsive ways for those needing services from school-aged children and teenagers through to the broader community.

"PHCOs will be geared to build on effective mental health programs like Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) and headspace, which have improved service capacity and which have targeted groups that struggle to access care, particularly young people and those within the low socio-economic sector.

"This country will see a new direction in mental health services that will be more coordinated, flexible and multidisciplinary in which teams of health professionals can work towards care plans that are better tailored for patient needs as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach.

"PHCOs' community driven health services will have a greater opportunity to capture the mental health needs of patients sooner rather than later because it's at the community level where mental health issues, and those at risk of developing a mental illness, are first identified.

"At the same time, PHCOs will provide a greater influence in educating the broader public about mental health issues and reducing the stigma associated with mental health as part of improving local population health standards across the country," he said.

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