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More hospital beds means more sick people: not better health care

Australia will have the unenviable reputation of leading the world on needlessly putting people into hospital unless there is real reform of the Australian health system, Australian General Practice Network Chair, Dr Emil Djakic, said today.

"Promising more hospital beds, as the Coalition has done as the centrepiece of its health policy, is not reform – it's giving up, it's surrendering," Dr Djakic said.

"This is a simplistic, short term response to a complex problem. It is regressive health policy – it's going back to more of what has been failing.

"It is a policy which panders to providers rather than meeting the needs of the community and patients: it focuses on illness rather than wellness.

"There is insurmountable evidence that a strong, affordable and effective health system is built upon general practice and primary health care.

"The evidence shows that countries with better primary care have better health outcomes, including total mortality rates, heart disease mortality rates and infant mortality and earlier detection of cancers and that the opposite is true of those countries which have an unbalanced focus on specialists and hospitals.

"As the World Health Organisation has pointed out, *'hospital-centrism carries a considerable cost in terms of unnecessary medicalisation and iatrogenesis, and compromises the human and social dimensions of health'*.

"So where is the real reform – where is the focus on general practice and primary health care?"

"The commitments on after hours care and GP infrastructure are welcome but in effect they simply give back something the government had already committed in the May budget and which the Coalition had previously said it would take away.

"What we need from both parties is a commitment to the reforms outlined in the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission – this was an independent commission of experts and political party politics should not be used as an excuse to bury its key recommendations.

"For many years, under both Liberal and Labor Governments, AGPN has been consistent in its call for reorientation of the Australian health system, away from our focus on hospitals, and towards a focus on improving health, preventing illness, providing integrated and comprehensive care in the community for those with chronic illnesses.

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"Australia's hospitalisation rates are twice the hospitalisation rates of Canada, and about 25 percent higher than the UK and the USA.

"If people can be looked after in the community, in general practice, then they should be – hospitals are essential but that's not where most people seek and need care.

"So whoever is elected on 21 August, we will be looking for their commitment to real reform, to reorientation of the health system – not simplistic responses like just increasing our already too high hospitalisation rates."

For media interviews please phone Karen Warner, Media Adviser on 0438 179 520