

## **AGPN CHAIRS AND CEO MEETING 3 NOVEMBER 2010**

### **MAKING HEALTH REFORM HAPPEN**

Chairs and CEOs of Australia's general practice networks today called on the Federal Government to move urgently to empower and enable the Network to form Australia's future primary health care organisations (PHCOs).

#### **The reason to act**

The Network emphasised the development of PHCOs as being fundamental to the nation's health care reforms which are needed to build a stronger, more accessible and equitable health system. The focus must be on implementing the primary health care reforms: that is where the most gains will be made.

Our current system is fragmented, services are not as well targeted as they could be and a systematic focus on prevention and promoting wellness is lacking. The Network has long recognised the international evidence that a strong primary health care system supported by regional structures empowered to plan, purchase and coordinate services in response to local community need can help overcome these fundamental weaknesses in our system.

The Network believes that the realisation of its long-held vision for primary health care, implemented through PHCOs, is among the single most important investments the Government can make in health reform. The Network enthusiastically supported the objectives and recommendations of the *National Primary Health Care Strategy* as reflecting the directions the Network has been pursuing over many years, and called on the Government to make robust and early down payments to implement this agenda. Implementing PHCOs will deliver on the Strategy's objectives of improving access and equity, better management of chronic conditions, increased prevention and improved quality, safety, performance and accountability.

#### **Core principles**

The Network restated its commitment to the core principles that must drive primary health care reform determined at a whole-of-Network strategic meeting in August 2010. An effective primary health care system must have:

- a focus on health needs: primary health care must be a setting to which people can bring a wide range of health problems and not just focus on illness and care
- enduring personal relationships: primary health care with general practice at its centre must be the medical home where patients can be guided through the health system

- comprehensive, continuous and person-centred care: facilitated by the ongoing relationship between a patient, their families and carers and a particular GP, supported by a practice team and other clinical and non-clinical services that are coordinated and integrated
- responsibility for population health enabled by data and information management, linked and integrated through functioning eHealth initiatives
- responsibility for the health of all in the community along the lifecycle, including responsibility for tackling the determinants of ill-health through a focus on disease prevention and health promotion as well as early detection as well as responsibility for addressing areas of key disadvantaged, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and the inequities in health care access and status that exist among Australia's rural and remote communities
- connected teams of health professionals: GPs, nurses, allied health, specialists where required and social services
- people as partners in managing their own health and that of their community: a focus on health literacy and self-management
- resources and investment delivering much better value than its alternatives: primary health care should not be treated as the "poor cousin" of the health spectrum. Short changing the primary health care sector will inevitably limit the ambitions of health reform.

### **Enabling the Network's commitment to act**

The Network's 2009 blueprint for PHCOs provides a 10-year plan and the roadmap for establishing PHCOs and aligns well with the Government's proposed *Medicare Locals*. The Network welcomed the Government's discussion paper on the governance and functions of *Medicare Locals* and the commitment that this important new system of regional organisations should be built on the strengths of current general practice networks reinforced by a broader range of providers and activities. This in fact reflects one of the existing strengths of general practice which is the continuous and long-term care of individuals and their families in the context of their communities, cultures, employment and education.

The Network believes Australia has an unprecedented opportunity to act to improve our health system, a system that already has many strong features by world standards. We must all work together with a shared sense of urgency to put in place the primary health care reforms.

The Network is primed, ready and eager to act to implement its plan for PHCOs; to work with the Government to make real a key foundation stone for Australian health reform. To achieve this timetable for reform, the Network needs:

- A mandate to ensure that evolved general practice networks can operate as 'full function' PHCOs with flexible funding (not siloed funding streams) with responsibility for planning, coordinating, purchasing and in some cases delivering primary and community health programs and services on a regional basis
- A mandate to ensure PHCOs can systematically address workforce planning, development and support for their regions
- A guarantee that PHCOs will be funded for success and sustainability. Expectations have to be matched by funding. Anything less than that will increase the gap between expectations and the impact PHCOs can make in building stronger, more resilient communities
- To be enabled and funded to implement strategies to address inequities. Importantly, this includes enabling general practice networks and other important service infrastructure such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to work in true partnership.