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## Health spending reform key to keeping costs down

Reducing the pressure on government health spending is best achieved through regional funding models and by smarter use of our health dollars, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Commenting on the release of the 2010 Intergenerational Report, Dr Djakic said the report recognised the pressures general practice has been feeling for some time.

“General Practitioners (GPs) have been watching increasing numbers of chronically ill patients, with heart disease and diabetes, walk into their surgeries. We have been telling governments for many years that the system needs change to cope with the tsunami of chronic illness we are facing,” said Dr Djakic.

Infrastructure, new funding models for general practice payments and developing regional health care organisations with a focus on meeting community health care needs are part of the solution to growing health care costs, he said.

The intergenerational report suggests diabetes care costs will increase by as much as 436 percent in the next 40 years, a staggering amount, and the care of type 2 diabetes patients will be largely in general practice.

“Large increases like this mean our workforce will be dealing with more patients, with more illnesses, for longer. The system needs to support general practice to use its workforce to capacity, so patients see the right provider at the right time.

“Infrastructure support to general practices would enable more to employ Practice Nurses who play a vital role in care management of the aged and chronically ill. Payments should follow the patient, so if they can be treated by another member of the health care team, the practice is supported to allow that.

“Current funding pays only for GP visits for these patients, it’s not adequate and it doesn’t meet patient access needs,” he said.

Dr Djakic said AGPN has been calling on Government to examine funding systems for general practice so patients could access the right care, at the right time and by the right provider.

“These elements are the most important to our patients, and that’s what health spending needs to provide. The growing number of the chronically ill and their impact on our health spending can be managed if the government invests in primary health care, it’s the most cost effective way to manage these conditions in the long term,” said Dr Djakic.

**For media interviews please phone AGPN Communications Manager Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190**