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COAG must support primary health care organisations

The Council of Australian Government's meeting next week must support the creation of primary health care organisations, or Australia could lose an opportunity to make real and effective change to millions of Australians lives, according to Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic said state premiers needed to contribute to stopping the blame game between state/territory governments and the Federal government by supporting the health reform agenda, not making it worse by continuing to use health as a political football.

"I think Australians are sick of this system where one side blames the other. And while both sides have acknowledged the problem, now our states and territories are refusing to sign up to genuine reform without trying to draw some political wins out of it.

"It's time to take the politics out of health and worry less about winning people's votes and more about keeping people healthy," he said.

Dr Djakic, who heads the peak body for the general practice network – or divisions of general practice – which will lead the primary health care organisations (PHCOs) announced yesterday by the Prime Minister said reform was necessary and the government was taking the right steps to make genuine change.

"We saw with the diabetes investment last month that the government is prepared to invest in alternative funding models and new care arrangements to make a difference to the health of Australians. That needs to be supported. The announcement of the PHCOs is another step in the right direction.

"States run hospitals and that's what they understand. I can appreciate they don't want to lose the money that is pumped into that end of the health system. However, what research tells us, what the experience of overseas systems shows us, is that the best way to improve health in any country is through investment in primary health care – general practice care."

Dr Djakic said about 700,000 people are hospitalised unnecessarily in Australia every year – one of the highest rates of any OECD country and investment in primary health care would reduce that number significantly.

"Australians deserve this chance to improve the health system. Health has always been used as a whipping boy for politicians. It's high time that blame game stopped, and not just through lip service, but through actions and the states and territories coming on board with the reform agenda," Dr Djakic said.

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