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Medicare Locals: new look, new approach to primary health care

The Australian General Practice Network has welcomed the new branding for Medicare Locals, which featured today at a Medicare Local Forum involving the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard at Parliament House.

"Australia's network of Medicare Locals will be easily identifiable as a cohesive national network with its new 'ribbon helix' branding but it's the changes Medicare Locals will bring to local health care services for both health care professionals and consumers that will make the difference over time," Dr Djakic said.

"Having a dedicated local body to oversee the coordination of primary health care services will provide all communities with a system that makes sense and is easier to navigate," he said.

"For years the Divisions of General Practice have been bedding down quality primary health care across Australia but now, as they evolve to become Medicare Locals, the branding and purpose of these new entities will become a lot clearer to the broader community.

"Today's fragmented primary care sector is shifting to a system of Medicare Locals that have been designed to link the variety of health services available in a region around the general practice sector.

"Organised primary health care is fundamental to improving health outcomes and through the 62 Medicare Locals being established across Australia, developments will be seen in for example:

- Improved preventive health care programs
- after hours care
- perspectives on service gaps and service needs
- greater choice of services to provide more care in the community setting
- better connections between primary health care services and hospital outpatient services.

"Health care is no longer about referral after referral; rather primary health care in this country is heading towards managing patients with teams of experts with greater access to more services.

"These services are not just *within* the health sector but beyond the health sector as well.

"Medicare Locals will establish links with services from general practices through to allied health professionals, right through to social care and aged care services.

"In addition, Medicare Locals have been designed to profile their specific region's needs in terms of disease profiles, workforce capacity, identifying service gaps and delivering preventive health programs and health services that better match their local communities.

"By improving access to services more health care can be provided locally and in turn more patients can look forward to being closer to home longer, rather than relying on local hospitals for health conditions that should be managed in their community setting," Dr Djakic said.

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