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Mental health investment in primary health care reaps benefits **Mental Health Week, 2011**

Australia's Medicare Local led primary health care sector is set to deliver better models of care for people needing mental health services across the nation, Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] Chair, Dr Emil Djakic said today.

During *Mental Health Week*, AGPN is reminding communities across Australia that the future of mental health services is changing as Medicare Locals start to embed locally driven, evidence-based services to improve the mental health and well being of people across Australia.

"Depression and anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health problems and are also among the most disabling in which people with mental health problems often struggle with living healthy, functional lives within their community or maintaining healthy relationships in the family setting," Dr Djakic said.

"The great majority of those who seek help do so from their GP, who is often working in teams with psychologists, social workers and other mental health and social care providers," he said.

"Over the last decade, GPs pivotal to mental health service provision in primary care, have been increasingly supported to deliver this multidisciplinary team based care through world-leading programs such as the Access to Allied Psychological Services – or ATAPS, which has significantly changed the mental health service landscape.

"Medicare Locals will further strengthen this role through co-ordinating services for consumers across, government, non-government, community and private sector organisations, providing a whole system of care and addressing service gaps for more vulnerable people.

"The expansion of ATAPS to a \$432 million program over five years, through funding made available under the Federal Government's Mental Health Reforms enable Medicare Locals to provide better services for people at risk of suicide, women with perinatal mental health problems, people who have been affected by natural disasters, children, young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders and be more responsive to the needs of local communities.

"Investments in mental health services should target a community's needs and that's where Medicare Locals can and will make the difference. In consultation with clinicians, consumers and their families, Medicare Locals will examine community requirements for mental health services within their borders to match needs with the right model of care.

"A broadening of mental health services that are less reliant upon fee-for service programs, will expand a community's access to and choice of mental health services," he said.

"Critical to this multidisciplinary approach is ensuring the programs are flexible and cater for the more intensive mental health services right down to the services that offer support or early intervention programs that can reduce the intensity of mental health problems," Dr Djakic said.

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