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Fast track Medicare Locals for benefit of Australia's health

The Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] is urging the Federal Government to fast track the commencement of as many Medicare Local primary health care organisations as possible from 1 July rather than limit the first roll out to 15.

"Medicare Locals, evolving from Australia's General Practice Networks, have been designed to better integrate general practice and other primary health care services around the needs of patients and communities," AGPN Chair Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"They will work to assist patients to get the right care at the right time and in the right place.

"They will reduce bureaucracy and red tape, and streamline primary health care so that patients have a more seamless journey through an often complex and bewildering health system.

"They are going to take some time to reach their full potential so the sooner we can get as many as possible in place the better.

"The first round of applications for General Practice Networks to evolve into broader primary health care organisations closed on 5 April and we understand the Government is close to making an announcement on the successful applicants.

"The Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon has previously announced that about 15 Medicare Locals will commence from 1 July.

"Our view is that if there are more than 15 that meet the criteria then they should have the opportunity to commence from that date as well.

"It would be far better to have 20 or 25 in place from 1 July than to delay until the second wave which is due on 1 January, 2012.

"If that means that the funding for Medicare Locals which was brought forward in the Budget needs to be spread more broadly across more Medicare Locals in the first year then so be it – it is far better to get these Medicare Locals started sooner.

"Medicare Locals will build on the successes of the general practice network over the past two decades, and on the strong general practice base of the network," Dr Djakic said.

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