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COAG urged to adopt primary health care reform

Reforms vital to the primary health care system must not be held hostage to the resolution of funding and reform processes for the hospital system, Chair of the Australian General Practice Network [AGPN], Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"AGPN welcomes Prime Minister Julia Gillard's further engagement in the Federal Government's push for health reform in the lead up to next week's Council of Australian Government's [COAG] meeting," Dr Djakic said.

"This is also the Prime Minister's opportunity to spell out her vision for the health system which is clearly about focusing on better health outcomes rather than being overly distracted by structural reforms," he said.

"AGPN has advocated strongly and clearly that the structural reforms are not an end in themselves. It's about systemic improvements that provide communities and individuals with better access to better integrated, high quality primary care services with a stronger emphasis on prevention. It's about reforms which lead to improved health outcomes for patients.

"To reject any opportunity to reform the primary health care system is in effect either confirming state and territory leaders want more of the same or they want this whole process back to the drawing board," Dr Djakic said.

"Two years of expert reports and extensive consultation with health care providers has shown that the current system is dysfunctional. There is a ground swell of support among providers, consumers and carers that our system has major flaws and that a system with a strong primary health care sector is the solution.

"The primary health care reforms being offered to the nation are designed to:

- Improve patient access and to reduce the inequality to that access
- Improve the management of chronic conditions and to divert patients from hospitals and instead improve the health care within the home setting and the primary care sector
- Increase the community's access to and exposure to preventative programs and measures
- Improve the quality, safety, performance and accountability of the primary care sector.

"AGPN's local General Practice Networks are pursuing this reform agenda by:

- Integrating the primary care system to reduce the divide between rural, regional and metropolitan communities
- Maintaining and improving the skilled workforce
- Improving the infrastructure and the partnerships within the primary care system and beyond to the Local Hospital Networks
- Implementing eHealth strategies to improve patient connectedness.

"Since the introduction of Medicare, the country finally has an opportunity to restructure and re-configure a health system for the future that's affordable and equitable," Dr Djakic said.

Media contact: Karen Warner, AGPN Media Adviser on 0438 179 520