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Unprecedented investment in primary mental health care is about leadership

Medicare Locals have been placed at the forefront of mental health reform in Australia following the Gillard Government's Federal Budget 2011-2012 announcement this evening, in which a third of the extra mental health funding will be delivered through Medicare Locals.

The Australian General Practice Network [AGPN] has welcomed:

- the \$344 million over five years for the provision of *coordinated care and flexible funding for people with severe and persistent mental illness*
- the increased funding for the *Access to Allied Psychological Services [ATAPS]* to the tune of \$206 million which effectively doubles this program over a five year period
- the early implementation of the *After Hours and Medicare Locals* programs of \$45 million over two years.

AGPN Chair Dr Emil Djakic said this investment demonstrates the roles of the Network and Medicare Locals in connecting care for people with mental health problems who have fallen through the cracks in the system.

"Tonight's Federal Budget announcements on mental health are a clear indication that investing in primary mental health care is the best way to improve these services for Australia's local communities.

"The coordinated care package has been well designed to ensure partnerships between Medicare Locals and non-government organisations are able to deliver better coordinated care for patients. This is about breaking down barriers between silos in the mental health sector giving patients better access to services that provide for their mental, physical and social needs.

"The new coordinated care program and an expanded ATAPS will build upon the mix of mental health services already available through the General Practice Network and create a broader range of services GPs can refer to and patients can access.

"The additional ATAPS funding will expand opportunities for better services for the more vulnerable and those at-risk including young people, men, those living in rural and remote Australia and those with high socio-economic disadvantage," Dr Djakic said.

AGPN is also pleased to see the needs of Australia's youth being addressed in tonight's Federal Budget with the expansion of **headspace** sites and Early Psychosis Prevention and Early Intervention Centres [EPPIC] across Australia.

"This is about providing mental health services that are appropriate for young people in the right setting, at the right time, which is what good health care is all about," Dr Djakic said.

"Overall, this investment in mental health defines a clear role for Medicare Locals in the health system and reflects the Federal Government's leadership in investing in services for people with complex and serious mental health problems across Australia," Dr Djakic said.

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