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Medicare Local objectives will help the disability sector

People with disability and their carers who rely heavily on the health system, as researched by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), will soon experience a better primary health care system that has been designed to give people greater access to better coordinated services, Australian General Practice Network Chair, Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"AIHW's report released today, *The use of health services among Australians with disability*, highlights the fundamental need to bring the health and social care sectors together, which will happen under the scheme of Medicare Locals," Dr Djakic said.

"Most people with a severe disability also have long term health conditions and have better health outcomes when treated at home or in a community setting for as long as possible," he said.

"To do that, coordinating bodies like Medicare Locals will map out and analyse the best solutions for better services to not only help the disabled but their carers as well.

"This is about a smarter way of delivering more responsive, needs-driven primary health care system; it's about using the workforce available to the community from the general practice sector through to the nursing community and allied health sector to increase options and choices for patients and ultimately better access.

"There is nothing startling about AIHW's report, (an analysis Australian Bureau of Statistics data from two surveys conducted 12 months prior to 2007-08) which found that people with a severe or profound disability were 3.5 times as likely to have consulted a specialist doctor; and five times as likely to have consulted both a specialist doctor and other health professionals as people without a disability.

"But what we do want to ensure is that each time a disabled person seeks the health service or social service that they need, that it's coordinated, accessible and affordable, through the work of Medicare Locals.

"In the mental health sector, work is already underway to expand the Access to Allied Psychological Services program through Medicare Locals, which will deliver greater and more affordable community-based services in a more timely and effective way to those who need support close to home.

"Tracking the demands placed on the primary health care sector is the job of Medicare Locals against a backdrop of providing flexible and adaptable solutions that integrate health and social services effectively," Dr Djakic said.

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