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## **The New Year brings in a new round of Medicare Locals**

The start of 2012 will see an additional 18 Medicare Locals come on board as the re-structuring of Australia's primary health care sector continues to build up and strengthen local health services across the nation, Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair, Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"Tomorrow we'll be past the half way mark with 37 Medicare Locals established out of the 62 to be mapped across Australia," Dr Djakic said.

"The establishment of Medicare Local primary health care organisations brings a shift towards a locally accountable system in which health service experts will assess needs and design local health services for communities within their Medicare Local catchment," he said.

"The days of an ad hoc system and 'catching up' where service gaps have emerged will be over and instead, we'll have the right people analysing, assessing and designing the right health services needed to meet local demands.

"Medicare Locals – led by clinicians and people from their communities - will become the strongest advocates and strategists for local communities when it comes to delivering better coordinated, relevant and responsive health services.

"Over time, there will be greater capacity for Medicare Local personnel to anticipate and identify problems in advance and to plan and address health service issues before they become a systemic problem.

"After hours care is one of the first steps in this process. Having the capability to manage funds locally, Medicare Locals will fund after hours services that can be tailor-made for regions based on workforce capacity and service demands.

"In the area of mental health, the expansion of Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) will provide more services to a greater number of those in need, particularly people requiring help for depression and anxiety – the more prevalent mental health conditions. The expansion of ATAPS means general practitioners and other local health services are getting in a lot earlier for people who need a mental health service and also matching that service to the intensity of their condition.

"Programs and services around preventative health will increasingly add to the Medicare Local agenda and in turn add to the better health outcomes of local communities. Preventing disease and better managing chronic health conditions like diabetes – a life-long and debilitating condition if left unchecked or mismanaged, will significantly contribute to better health outcomes, a better spend of the health dollar and a better use of Australia's health system overall.

"The implementation of Medicare Locals is one of the biggest health reforms since the establishment of Medicare itself, but to reach their full potential a number of pre-requisites are to be met including appropriate levels of flexible funding and access to data and information currently held by governments so they can plan and target resources accordingly," Dr Djakic said.

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