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Most ambitious health reforms since introduction of Medicare

The Rudd Government's proposed national health agenda lays out the most far-reaching reform of the Australian health system since the introduction of Medibank and Medicare says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) chair Dr Emil Djakic.

"What has been proposed today is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reduce avoidable hospitalisations and deaths, reduce the burden of disease on society, and reduce the overwhelming strain on our health system," Dr Djakic said.

He applauded the Commission's proposals to base their reform recommendations on strengthening general practice and primary health care.

"The reality is that we will never relieve the pressure on our hospitals unless we first put in place a stronger primary health care system," Dr Djakic said.

He pointed to the growing burden of chronic illness – diseases like diabetes, heart disease, mental health, and other diseases associated with ageing – as illnesses best treated in the community.

"We can predict that there will be those who will say the report hasn't gone far enough, that it doesn't do enough for the hospital system. It's predictable, it's regrettable and it's mistaken.

"To truly tackle chronic disease and the major health inequalities which exist in Australia, we must follow the lead of other developed nations and establish a strong, organised primary health care system, built on general practice."

Dr Djakic, chair of the peak national body supporting general practice networks, said the Rudd Government's move to focus on primary health care as the first and most significant foundation for improving healthcare for all Australians should be praised.

AGPN supported the proposed reforms in principle and was eager to work with government, with other general practice organisations, and the broader primary health care sector to learn more about the proposal details, and begin developing implementation plans.

"Today is a landmark day for the recognition of general practice and primary health care. There are many recommendations supported by Government today that AGPN has campaigned for several years to see as part of our health system," he said. "We celebrate that achievement with general practice today. The Government has listened to the evidence in health care – the evidence says primary health care models provide cost effective, best practice care," Dr Djakic said.

The move to regional primary health care organisations to support general practice and the primary health care team to deliver the right care for their communities will see increased options available to practices and patients in care and models of delivery.

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