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## Mental health programs to aid suicide prevention

Government needs to invest more in mental health programs rolled out in general practice so fewer patients fall through the cracks in the system, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Sane Australia this week released a report showing follow up care for patients who had attempted suicide was poor.

The report: *Research Bulletin 11: Suicide, self-harm and mental illness* said 30 percent of people were not referred to follow up care following a suicide attempt and more than 50 percent were not offered psychological therapy.

"These figures are worrying for those of us in general practice. General Practitioners (GPs) are at the forefront of mental health care and we offer a number of services to patients who need additional care. There are a number of programs designed to help these patients, and their doctors," he said.

The expansion of existing national mental health programs like the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) Program and **headspace** would prevent people falling through the gaps, Dr Djakic said.

In its 2010-2011 Federal Budget submission AGPN calls on the Federal Government to increase the amount spent on ATAPS and **headspace** to help general practice cope with growing mental health needs of the community.

Patients referred to ATAPS can receive up to 12 sessions with a mental health specialist (like a psychologist, social worker or mental health nurse) for short-term mental health intervention support.

"Through ATAPS patients, particularly low socio-economic groups, have been able to access mental health services. It has made a significant contribution to health services we can offer patients," said Dr Djakic.

**headspace** centres support young people between the ages of 15 and 25 with mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Centres are staffed by experienced youth and mental health workers.

AGPN also provides mental health support for drought affected communities through a network of community support workers providing outreach services to individuals and families experiencing the impact of a changing climate.

"The mental health situation in Australia will not improve without heavy investment in these effective programs. Clearly more patients need access to them. General practice is stretched to its limits and the extra funding will help us better manage the mental and physical health of our communities," said Dr Djakic.

**For media interviews please phone AGPN Communications Manager Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190**