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MBS review – a step in the right direction but unfinished business

Australian General Practice Network Chair, Dr Emil Djakic, today supported the move to enable preventive health services to be funded through Medicare.

Dr Djakic was commenting on the Government's internal review of primary health care items of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

"At a time when the health debate is centred on the need for our system to be much more prevention-oriented, AGPN particularly welcomes moves to enable GP attendance items to be used for preventative health care," said Dr Djakic.

"We know that general practice is a key setting for health promotion and illness prevention, along with other settings such as schools and workplaces.

"The ability to use attendance items for preventative health care is a major improvement. Constraints on GP time and financing restrictions have been a major barrier to the delivery of quality preventative care in the general practice setting – these changes will help overcome that.

"AGPN recognises that these incentives will go some way to a prevention-oriented health system but they are not the total solution. We will be making several other suggestions to improve the capacity of the primary health care system in prevention in its submission to the National Preventative Health Taskforce.

"In particular AGPN believes there is a need for team funding arrangements for practices to provide whole of person care for their patients and a move away from item numbers which fragment care.

"AGPN also supports the simplification of the referral arrangements under the Enhanced Primary Care chronic disease management items.

"It has long been recognised that the primary health care sector will bear the brunt of the burgeoning growth in the rates of chronic disease in the Australian community.

"We have heard repeatedly from our members that GPs and allied health providers alike have been struggling with the current administration arrangements with the chronic disease management plan and team care arrangement items.

"At a time when general practice is feeling the pressure of workforce shortages and growing rates of chronic disease, these are important initial steps to streamline the MBS and to reduce the amount of red tape involved with the administration of the MBS by practices so that better quality and timely chronic disease care can be delivered to patients.

"The MBS and the way primary health care is funded in Australia is due for an overhaul. While these proposed changes are a useful down payment, AGPN will be looking for further reform to health care financing as part of the Government's longer term health agenda.

"It is essential to the health of the community and the viability of Australia's health system into the future that we support the capacity of general practice and the wider primary health care team to provide high quality, accessible and affordable care"

"While fee for service should remain a cornerstone of our system, it is essential that we have additional, non-MBS modes of funding in the form of programs such as ATAPS and MAHS if we are to reach those people with complex and chronic conditions who need care the most in rural, regional and outer metro Australia."

Media inquiries please contact:

David Butt

CEO, AGPN: 0411 474 912