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Organised primary health care the road to access

Access to health services for all Australians will be a significant gain for the health system if the government moves to create Primary Health Care Organisations says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic today presented the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon with the Network's proposal for the form and function of the new organisations suggested as part of the national health reform agenda.

Both the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) final report and the Draft National Primary Health Care Strategy suggest developing Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCOs) to improve the health and wellbeing of the Australian population.

"Both the NHHRC and the draft strategy are short on detail about these new organisations. What we have attempted is to fill in the gaps left in those reports, focusing on how to improve the health of our communities, with general practice at the core of system change," Dr Djakic said.

The reform agenda reports both suggest the general practice network, which has been part of Australian health care since the early 1990s, as the best starting point for organised primary health care in this country.

Dr Djakic, who leads AGPN, the national peak body for the Network, said they were ready to stand up to the challenge of becoming PHCOs.

"Access to health care is a significant issue for a large proportion of Australians. Australians in rural and remote parts of the country, Australians in the outer metropolitan areas of the country and Australians who are disadvantaged and living in the middle of our largest cities. It is a serious issue. PHCOs are one cog in the wheel that can change that situation," he said.

Dr Djakic said one of the biggest problems with Australian health care was that patients often saw the wrong provider, at the wrong time and at the wrong cost – he wants to reverse that situation.

"The reality is we have a health system now that pays doctors to see patients. There is no incentive to improve patient health and GPs are not properly supported to do that. PHCOs are one mechanism to change our system to a more patient focused, and GP supporting, one. We trust the Minister will consider our model for PHCOs and I commend it to her," he said.

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