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A step in the right direction to getting back to basics

Today's national health reform announcements provide the opportunity for better health for all Australians but only if the Commonwealth acts quickly to strengthen the primary health care sector, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

"While AGPN welcomes the moves to improve our public hospital system, real change – prevention of unnecessary illness and reductions in Australia's high hospitalisation rates – will only occur through strengthened primary health care based around general practice," Dr Djakic said.

"We therefore applaud the commitment by the Commonwealth to take total responsibility for all primary health care because if implemented correctly it has the potential to significantly improve health and reduce the pressure on hospitals.

"But to implement it correctly requires establishing a more equitable relationships between the hospital sector and the primary health care sector – at the moment it is not equal which is one of the reasons Australia has such high hospitalisation rates.

"Our health system needs two equally strong pillars – one is our hospital system and the second has to be our primary health care and general practice system. The Prime Minister has committed to establishing that first strong pillar for hospitals today – we eagerly await a similar commitment to building the strong primary health care pillar, based on general practice.

"What the Prime Minister has got right is his commitment to one health system and one health funder. This is the only real way to end the blame game. The reformation of the health sector is well overdue and we are pleased primary health care with general practice at its foundation has been recognised as a vital part of this process."

Dr Djakic stressed the need for the Government to maintain two sectors in health care, hospital and primary, and utilise the relationship crossover these have in regional areas.

"A reformed primary health care system must have general practice at its centre and quarantined funding distinctly separate to the acute sector.

"We know that this system works and by maintaining the same financial processes (quarantined funding) it ensures that the money is not syphoned off into the acute sector.

"Only separate primary health care organisations with a direct funding link will give us a sustainable health system," said Dr Djakic.

He noted that while today's announcement was a good start the government would need to act on these changes and release the other stages of the reform agenda in a timely manner.

AGPN looks forward to the rest of the government's health reform agenda and working with government to secure and improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

For media interviews please phone AGPN Communications Officer Ben Graham on 02 6228 0828 or 0430 586 022.