



**28 April 2010**

## **Patients will lose out if reform commitment is watered down**

The Federal Government needs to articulate a clear commitment to primary health care as the foundation of Australia's health care future in its ongoing development of the National Health and Hospitals Network, said Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Speaking at the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute health reform series, Dr Djakic said primary health care organisations (PHCOs) would only benefit patients if they are given sufficient scope and resources to deliver.

"What PHCOs will deliver is a stronger primary health care foundation. In the longer term this will support better population health outcomes and a more efficient health system that is less reliant on hospitals," he said.

Dr Djakic called on the government to clarify the role and functions of PHCOs.

"AGPN argues for six key directions: population health planning, health promotion, access, integrate services, develop the workforce and drive service and health outcome improvements.

"If PHCOs are not given real authority, responsibility and funding to carry out broad roles for their local populations and be responsible for improved health outcomes, then it may be a backwards step from where the Network is today," he said.

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission final report identified primary health care as a leading factor in bringing the health system back from the brink of failure, he said.

"Christine Bennett referred to the health system as being at 'tipping point' and one of the major pillars needed to stop it toppling over is a strong, organised general practice and primary health care system. To come out of the COAG negotiations with a blurred vision on primary health care could derail the potential of the reform agenda," Dr Djakic said.

He warned that the continued focus on hospitals and expanding their role will deliver more of the same to patients – poor access, increasing hospitalisations and failure to cope with the growing chronic disease burden as the population ages and waist lines increase.

"PHCOs will have to know and understand their communities and monitor changes in their health outcomes over time. PHCOs will be responsible for improving population health at local and regional levels so will have to deliver effective local solutions.

"Far from being a bureaucracy PHCOs will be an essential infrastructure to ensure patients see the right provider at the right time and at the right cost. That is missing from our system now, and it will be patients who lose if the status quo remains," he said.

**For media interviews contact Communications Manager Frith Rayner on: 0402 267 190**