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Community to benefit from Primary Health Care Strategy reform

Patients will have better access to more integrated, organised health care through proposed changes to payment models for general practice and establishment of Regional Primary Health Care Organisations under the draft Primary Health Care Strategy, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic, a Tasmanian GP, welcomed the recognition of the benefits which will flow to the community through different payment and organisational models, which AGPN supported in its submission to the External Reference Group which reported to the Health Minister.

"Australia's general practice network has already gone a significant way in enhancing the organisation of more integrated general practice and primary health care for the community," he said. "They are well placed and committed in principle to take on the role of regional Primary Health Care Organisations to further enhance access to services for the community."

AGPN has lobbied for blended payment models which would mean fee-for-service remained the main funding mechanism for GPs, but with other payment methods such as payments for quality and for care for those with chronic illnesses enabling greater flexibility in how the primary health care team supports patients.

"Patients with complex conditions are not well served by fee-for-service. They need a system that helps GPs spend more time with them when they need it and facilitates a number of health professionals being involved in their care. As a GP, that's the kind of care I want my patients to get – but I'm not supported to provide it," he said.

Dr Djakic said AGPN was pleased regional primary health care organisations were endorsed as a key element of the strategy, a role the Network has signalled it wants to assume.

"Evidence tells us that organised primary health care, which helps patients to more easily navigate the health system, better links and supports general practice and other primary care providers and has a focus on population health needs and planning through improved data provision, has a much higher success rate in keeping patients well. We want to see that kind of system operating in Australia and we believe we are the Network to deliver it," Dr Djakic said.

"Likewise extra support for physical infrastructure and eHealth is essential to the reforms being mooted. Without these the objectives of patient centred care and better access will be hard to reach."

Expanding multidisciplinary teams, where General Practitioners (GPs) have a central role would also see improved patient outcomes, patients who are better able to manage their own conditions and ensure GP time is focused on cases that need their expertise. Dr Djakic said AGPN has campaigned for a primary health care strategy for many years and was pleased with the progress towards a national plan.

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