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Medicare Benefits Schedule Review a down payment on reform - AGPN

Changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), which determines rebates for patients, will free doctors up to focus on preventing ill health and are a good down payment on reform, Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic said today.

"We welcome the Government's response to AGPN and other bodies which have worked for some time to slash red tape and release GPs to get on with what they do best – look after people," Dr Djakic said.

In welcoming the changes announced today, Dr Djakic, who leads the national peak body for Australia's general practice networks, said further and more dramatic funding changes will be needed if government is to effectively put general practice and primary health care at the frontline of the health system.

"The simplification of the schedule gives me hope for the future – it's easier to use. For the first time it officially recognises prevention is bread and butter work for GPs, which is long overdue. It's simply playing catch up with what we already do. But it's not Christmas yet and there are still some things on my wish list."

AGPN lobbied hard for GPs during review change consultations, calling for a streamlining of item numbers and support for prevention.

"For a number of years major changes in health policy in this country occurred through additional items to the schedule, but over time it has become complex, and subject to increasingly difficult bureaucratic rules and interpretations," Dr Djakic said.

The changes, which take effect from 10 May, 2010 also cover after hours attendance items, health assessment items and chronic disease items. Many item numbers have been brought together to streamline the billing process for GPs and practice staff, and the claiming process for patients.

"Streamlining the schedule will make it easier for GPs and patients. Patients will be eligible for Medicare rebates much more clearly related to the services GPs provide.

"I'm encouraged by the Government's willingness to recognise that changing our payment models will influence patient's access to the right provider at the right time and, importantly, at the right cost. It shows they are willing to invest in general practice and what we do.

"So next on my Christmas list is a genuine investment in general practice integrated models of care which are focused on the needs of patients and the community, infrastructure to support those models and early movement on reforming our health system," Dr Djakic said.

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