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Hospital focus could ruin the chance for genuine health improvements

Primary health care organisations need real teeth, real funding and real opportunity to change the system to achieve improvements in health care delivery, access and services to patients said Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic said despite the Council of Australian Governments move to endorse the Rudd Government's plan to bring together community health, mental health and general practice, there remains ambiguity about roles, functions and relationship with the hospital sector.

"Moving the focus of our system out of hospitals and into primary care – where the majority of Australians seek health care – is fundamental to the success of this reform process. Failure to, will mean system failure.

"True health reform can not be driven by hospital networks, their focus will always be on treating patients. History, and international experience, teaches us that systems run from hospitals, put hospitals first. Where real change has happened, primary health care is in the drivers seat, working closely with hospital networks," Dr Djakic said.

He called for a clear statement of vision for primary health care organisations (PHCOs) – what they will do and not do and clarity on their roles. General Practitioners (GPs) need to know the Government is serious about investing and building on the sector that will make the most difference to our collective healthy future.

"PHCOs could make a significant impact on how patients experience health care. We know the system is jig-saw puzzle health – we have all the pieces, but the patient is charged with putting them all together.

"PHCOs will solve the puzzle, along with adding access to GPs, allied health professionals and health education. It will mean patients have access to health care services that focus on what their community needs and is flexible enough to work with local communities to find health solutions," Dr Djakic said.

Dr Djakic said the Network around the country was ready, willing and able to take on this task.

"The reality is 700,000 Australians wind up in hospital every year who should not be there. With PHCOs that number will decrease. The system we have, with its heavy focus on hospital care and whiz-bang machines is not delivering high quality health care to all Australians and we have an opportunity to fix it.

"Right now GPs need to know the Government is serious about health system change, is focused on general practice care and is clear how we will achieve it," Dr Djakic said.

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