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Australia's General Practice Networks want to be empowered to transform primary health care

The biggest challenge facing primary health care reform is the matching of expectations with available funding, Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) CEO David Butt said today.

In its response to the Federal Government's *Medicare Locals – Discussion paper on governance and functions*, AGPN has made it clear that empowering the Network is fundamental to achieving its primary health care reforms if the Government's health reform schedule is to be met.

Mr Butt called for the government to outline its 10 year vision for Medicare Locals (MLs) and the maturity mapping which will be required to reach that point, including realistic expectations of capability and performance at July 2011, July 2012, July 2016 and July 2021.

"We need clarity about the expectations of what MLs might do over time with the practical reality of what they will be able to do given budget constraints," Mr Butt said.

"It is vital that MLs are not set up to fail – accountability for change and performance must be commensurate with capability, so they need to be properly funded to ensure successful transition and increasingly effective operations.

Mr Butt said the Network has reinforced to the Gillard Government that it is ready and willing to function as PHCOs or MLs, which will evolve from the Divisions of General Practice across Australia on the basic proviso:

- A *mandate* is established to ensure that evolved general practice networks can operate as 'full functioning' PHCOs with flexible funding (not siloed funding streams) with responsibility for planning, coordinating, purchasing and in some cases delivering primary and community health programs and services on a regional basis
- A *guarantee* is given that PHCOs will be funded for success and sustainability. Expectations have to be matched by funding. Under-funding will increase the gap between expectations and the impact PHCOs can make in building stronger, more resilient communities

- The Network is enabled to implement strategies to address inequities. Importantly, this includes enabling general practice networks and other important service infrastructure such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to work in true partnership.

Mr Butt said AGPN's submission sets out clear fundamentals that the Network needs to provide the confidence to proceed with the implementation of Medicare Locals across the country.

For a copy of the submission go to the Media section: www.agpn.com.au/

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