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Primary health care the key to unlocking Australian's chronic health conditions

Health care reform will lower the chronic disease burden on our hospitals by providing more support to general practice to manage these illnesses in the community, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

Responding to the release of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report: *Insulin-treated diabetes in Australia 2000 – 2007* Dr Djakic said the increasing prevalence of illnesses like type 1 and type 2 diabetes pressed the claim for a health system change.

"We have seen cases of chronic illnesses amplify across the board. What we need is a health system that supports general practice to cope with this influx and help prevent diabetes developing in patients in the first place," said Dr Djakic, a Tasmanian GP.

Dr Djakic endorsed Health Minister Nicola Roxon's view that health reform to tackle the issues was needed.

The AIHW report highlighted the rise of type 1 in children, showing Australian diabetes diagnosis had more than doubled between 1989-1990 and 2004-2005.

The report also indicated a 63 percent increase in the amount of people taking insulin to manage their type 2 diabetes.

"We know that the majority of type 2 diabetes cases are largely preventable. GPs and practice teams can help their patients manage their diabetes and in many cases avoid insulin dependence through diet and exercise," he said.

Many general practice networks around Australia run lifestyle modification programs to help at risk patients. The programs support patients to undertake sustained lifestyle and behaviour change to reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

There is a growing body of international evidence showing that lifestyle modification programs leads to a significant reduction in the incidence of type 2 diabetes, by up to 58 percent.

"The integral role of primary health care in managing chronic conditions and improving the health system has been highlighted by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission final report, now we need to see action on reform to see action in health outcomes," Dr Djakic said.

To find where your local LMP is or to find out more information on the program please go to www.agpn.com.au.

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