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Community care the key to suicide prevention

Investment in community-based mental health care will reduce suicides, improve access to care and ensure patients are not lost in the system, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

As part of its evidence to Senate Community Affairs Committee's Inquiry into Suicide Prevention hearings AGPN called for community-based early intervention mental health services through general practice.

"General practice is the right place to focus our attention to avoid suicides. We know there is a correlation between mental illness and suicide, with between 30 and 90 percent of people who commit suicide having an existing condition, they should be supported and get care in the community – not after a suicide attempt in hospital.

"The message is always: prevention is better than cure, and in general practice we focus on prevention, we need support to deliver that care to patients," Dr Djakic said.

The AGPN submission called for new and effective community-based models of care comprising a hub of clinical and non-clinical primary care services.

"There isn't a one size fits all model for mental health care. We need a toolkit of connected programs so patients can access care through a number of mechanisms.

"Programs like ATAPS and **headspace** have improved service capacity, particularly targeting groups that struggle to access care and who can be particularly at risk of suicide and self-harm – young people and lower socio-economic groups," said Dr Djakic.

The government has undertaken to reform the health system and building suicide and mental health capacity must be part of the reform process, Dr Djakic said.

"Mental health can't afford to be sidelined in the reform process, we're expanding the workforce, building super clinics and infrastructure now let us make sure general practice has the programs and the support to care for our patients.

"AGPN has continued to push for further development of mental health programs in our Budget submission. We need to take the successful programs we have, build on them, invest in them and support general practice to deliver them or more people will be lost in a system that doesn't care appropriately for the mentally ill," he said.

**For media interviews please phone Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190
For information on the AGPN Submission and 2010/2011 AGPN Federal Budget
submission go to: www.agpn.com.au/policy.**