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General Practice contribution recognised by Reform Commission

GPs around the country would be celebrating the recognition of their role in the release of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission draft recommendations, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) chairman Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic, a Tasmanian GP and leader of the peak national body for the Divisions of General Practice Network, said for too long primary care had been the 'poor cousin' to the acute sector.

"General practice is where patients get the care they need so they can avoid hospital stays. It makes sense, when the Government wants to focus on disease prevention, to invest in primary health care," he said.

While the health system looks in good shape from the outside, Dr Djakic says Australia's long life expectancy and low infant mortality rates mask access issues, inequality of service – especially for Indigenous and rural and remote areas – and poorly connected services. Workforces now and in the future flag a looming crisis in health care.

"I would defy any GP in Australia to suggest that the system we have provides equitable access to health care for all Australians, it simply does not," he said.

"There is a well recognised difference between what we spend on Medicare in urban areas, and the spend in rural – it shows rural people lose out in the current system."

International research and examples make a good case for regionalised care, aimed squarely at the needs of local populations, with GPs being the clinical care leaders, said Dr Djakic.

The WHO World Health Report last year suggested the worlds' burden of disease could be reduced by as much as 70 per cent if better use of preventative measures, which are best delivered in primary care, he said.

"For too long the power in health care has rested with the acute sector. System change from acute to primary care won't happen naturally, it needs the Government and stakeholders to take the lead. The Government has promised a commitment to primary health care, and if they follow through with these recommendations it's a very positive step in the right direction," he said.

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