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General practice playing a critical role in reducing hospital admissions

Today's release of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report *Atlas of Avoidable Hospitalisations in Australia: ambulatory care-sensitive conditions* clearly indicates the important role general practice plays in keeping Australians out of hospital through early intervention and prevention strategies such as the effective management of chronic conditions.

The report using statistics from over five years ago suggests that over 500,000 hospital admission across Australia in 2001-02 were avoidable.

Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said that the since data in the report was gathered in 2001-02 general practice has become more effective at managing and screening for chronic diseases. However the findings do indicate the burden preventable illnesses are having on the health system.

"General practice can far better manage chronic diseases than it could five years ago. Through the use of new Medicare items such as the GP management plans (GPMP) and team care arrangements (TCA), which allow GPs to use the services of allied health care professionals such as dietitians and podiatrists, general practice has a more structured approach to chronic disease management.

"This gives the patient professional advice and services to manage their conditions and stay out of the hospital system.

"General practice is the front door to the health system with over 70% of GP consultations are related to chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, mental illnesses, asthma and cancer. What better place to continue to implement preventative strategies?" Dr Hobbs said.

The report found almost two-thirds of avoidable hospital admissions were attributable to chronic conditions, with large numbers from diabetes complications and circulatory and respiratory conditions.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said that the levels of chronic disease especially diabetes are significantly increasing.

"It is absolutely essential to increase levels of understanding about the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. By not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly and having a healthy diet it is possible to reduce the chances of suffering from a chronic condition," Ms Carnell said.

With the aim of reducing the level of chronic diseases, increasing early detection and improving treatment options, AGPN in its budget submission proposed:

- obesity be recognised as a chronic disease under Medicare to improve access to treatment

- children's health check ups, including biometrics when they have their 4yr old immunisations
- a practice nurse payment allowing nurses and Aboriginal health workers to conduct specific preventative health checks
- expanding the practice nurse subsidy to cover all general practices in Australia.

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