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Immediate dollars for long-term health investment

In the lead up to tomorrow night's Federal Budget the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) is urging the Commonwealth to recognise the importance of investing in preventative health measures now to ensure a more sustainable health system for the future.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said AGPN's Budget Submission contained a number of solid, strategic and workable solutions to improve preventative health care and access to health services.

"Without doubt we are a nation getting fatter and unfitter. If measures aren't introduced now to reverse these trends obesity and type 2 diabetes levels are going to cripple this country.

"We have given the Australian Government some extremely positive options such as having obesity recognised under Medicare as a chronic disease. This would allow general practice to intervene earlier and more effectively treat this condition. Obesity is a major contributor to many other chronic diseases such as heart disease, asthma, cancer and type 2 diabetes," Dr Hobbs said.

AGPN covered a number of other areas in its budget submission, including improving access to mental health services, strengthening the health system and infrastructure and investing in early childhood health.

A summary of AGPN's recommendations include:

- Introducing a specific **preventative health check** item number for Aboriginal health workers and practice nurses
- Network-based organising **chronic disease co-ordinators** to assist patients get their required levels of care
- The development of a **cancer control strategy** allowing for improved cancer prevention, diagnosis and management
- The expansion of the **practice nurse incentive** payment to all practices in Australia
- An expansion of the More Allied Health Services program to **urban areas with workforce** shortages
- An **infrastructure grants** scheme for practice expansion, amalgamation and co-location
- Increasing **mental health workers in** rural areas
- A national campaign on **children's healthy eating** delivered through general practice
- **Improving Aboriginal health** by: providing cultural awareness training for health care providers; introducing a support scheme for workers in remote communities; a scholarship

scheme for the placement of Aboriginal Health Workers and; developing a national scheme to allow AHW to access Medicare item numbers available to practice nurses.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell who will be available for interview pre and post budget 0415 662 266