



# News Release

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

04/42

29/09/04

## Match funding for hospitals with primary care, say Divisions

The Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd (ADGP) has cautiously welcomed today's announcement by the ALP to boost funding for hospital care for people over 75, but says that health costs will continue to grow unsustainably unless further investment is made in supporting the primary care sector to ensure the prevention of disease, early intervention and effective chronic disease management.

"While clearly there is a need to support older Australians who need hospital care, substantial evidence exists that refocusing health systems on primary care is vital to ensure better health outcomes and contain health costs for the whole nation," says Dr Rob Walters, Chair of ADGP.

"It has been demonstrated internationally that the need for hospital services is significantly reduced when appropriate, affordable and coordinated services are available earlier in the system.

"We must change our thinking, so that hospitals are regarded as the service of last resort, when all other options have been exhausted," he said.

"GPs and their patients would of course welcome a reduction in hospital waiting lists for elective surgery, particularly for those older Australians whose quality of life is severely affected by a lack of access to affordable treatments or operations, but with the depleted state of the specialist workforce in public hospitals, where are the doctors going to come from?

"Once they are discharged from hospital, the care of older Australians falls on the GP and other primary care services, which are also undermanned, as well as undervalued, unintegrated and under-funded.

"We need health policies that better reflect a whole of health system approach, where health care is delivered in a seamless continuum between peoples' homes, general practices, community services, hospitals and residential aged care," said Dr Walters.

"Divisions of general practice have played a significant role in supporting the integration of health services in their communities.

They are undertaking work to better manage patients on hospital waiting lists, to support the delivery of GP services to aged care homes, and to provide better access to allied health services for GP patients.

"If Labor is elected to government, we hope that the proposed National Health Reform Commission will look hard at these issues and the structural barriers in the health care funding and delivery systems to ensure that all Australians receive high quality health care where and when they need it."

*The Divisions of General Practice Network links 95 per cent of GPs across Australia in a national structure that supports general practice and improves community access to primary care. This Network is the key to integrating general practice with other sectors of the health system, both government and non-government, to deliver high quality care to the Australian community.*

For comment:

Dr Rob Walters, ADGP Chair, 0418 127 123

For further information:

Kerry Ungerer, National Communications Manager, 0412 424 309