



# News Release

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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## **Role of primary health care highlighted at international Ageing Conference**

Two sessions at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity in Brisbane will focus on the need to improve the health and wellbeing of older Australians through primary health care teams.

The Conference brings together experts from a range of organisations to discuss two major topics: 'Healthy ageing begins at birth' and 'Promoting mental health and wellbeing in older Australians'.

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP), Australia's peak body representing the divisions of general practice network, said today that whilst many older Australians enjoy a good sense of wellbeing, it is also important that we don't lose sight of the fact that older people often suffer from multiple chronic and complex conditions, making diagnosis and treatment sometimes difficult.

"The most vulnerable older Australians are those with existing mental health problems or with mental health and chronic or other disease co-morbidity, particularly those who are isolated, living in residential care facilities or in rural or remote areas," said Dr Walters.

"The invitation for ADGP to present at the Conference highlights the important role that GPs and divisions of general practice play in the provision of care for older Australians," he said.

"In fact, we need to remind ourselves that over one in four GP consultations are for people aged 65 and over."

The link between poor mental health and physical health and their impact on quality of life for older Australians will be a major topic for discussion at the Conference.

"Older people are particularly prone to depression because of a range of life events that frequently coincide with ageing such as physical illness, isolation, chronic pain and bereavement," said Dr Walters.

"Despite this, diagnosing depression in the elderly may often be overlooked. This is because the risk factors are many and varied. Taking a team-based holistic approach to the care of older Australians will help to ensure their varied mental and physical health needs are supported."

"Australia is ageing at a significant rate. Conferences such as this provide an opportunity for health professionals, governments and the community to give serious consideration to issues such as how best to provide care to older people, workforce constraints, promoting health and well being, and the economic costs of an ageing population," Dr Walters said.

ADGP CEO Ms Kate Carnell said that to ensure healthy ageing and a life well lived, it is essential that the health system, health providers and consumers shift from a focus on illness and disease to prevention, health promotion and holistic care.

"There are a number of active programs being implemented via the divisions network that help to address the mental health and general health issues that specifically face ageing Australians. These include the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative, the Aged Care GP Panels Initiative, the practice nurse initiative, the rural palliative care program and specific Medicare Benefits Schedule items," said Ms Carnell.

*For comment:*

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