

15 February 2007

State and territory health priorities welcomed

Health reform principles decided upon at last Friday's meeting of the Council for the Australian Federation attended by all state and territory government premiers and chief ministers have been applauded by Australia's peak body representing 119 divisions of general practice, the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

The principles demonstrate the Council's recognition of the importance of a holistic approach to improve primary health care in Australia, aiming to keep people healthy and out of stretched hospital systems.

The spiralling costs and burdens on hospitals are triggered by a combination of factors such as the ageing population, increasing costs of medical technology, the growing levels of chronic diseases and community expectations.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said the principles clearly recognise the current system is unsustainable with a new approach needed that will keep people out of the hospital system.

"By focusing on a wellness health system, there is no doubt that pressure on hospitals will be alleviated over time. It will also improve the overall health of individual Australians as well as the system as a whole.

"84% of Australians visit a GP each year. Allocating more resources to primary health care allows for further prevention and early intervention of chronic disease," Dr Hobbs said.

The principles mirror the AGPN *Primary Healthcare Position Statement* including:

- strengthening care provided by GPs and community health services
- improved relationships between hospitals and primary health care providers
- improvements to health IT
- making the system more equitable with a specific focus on Indigenous health
- strengthening the workforce
- the improvement of funding models

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said these principles act as realistic, achievable goals. They also allow for the primary health care sector's role to be significantly increased.

"Taking this holistic view on primary health care ensures each principle will work as an important component of an overall plan to improve primary health care in Australia.

"AGPN and the Network look forward to working with state health departments to develop practical strategies implement these principles in co-ordinated national approach," Ms Carnell said.

The Network is well placed to deliver solutions through their general practice members to improve patient well being in Australia.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662266