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‘Medicare Locals’ must be more than just GPs

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has expressed concern that the Australian Government’s plan to establish ‘Medicare Locals’ excludes important areas of the public health sector vital to the improvement of health services. PHAA believes the current model is focussed primarily on general practitioners (GPs), excluding important community-based public health and prevention programs.

“Information provided to date has not indicated an appropriate emphasis on ensuring Medicare Locals comprehensively incorporate the whole primary health care sector. For instance, Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) that have been very successful in providing high level, holistic care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples could be undermined by the transition to Medicare Locals as currently proposed. The model also fails to take into account important preventive health and community-based services that are vital to achieving improvements in population health outcomes,” explained Professor Helen Keleher, PHAA President.

“The provision of programs and primary care by AMSs, Community Health Services and Women’s Health Services should not be undermined by Medicare Locals. Indeed, these established systems, built on decades of experience with minority groups with complex and chronic conditions, will need to be supported and expanded if they are to reach the growing pool of people living on low incomes. These are equity principles which are essential to the fabric of Medicare Locals.

“PHAA is concerned that Medicare Locals, constructed on Divisions of General Practice as currently proposed, will not sufficiently support these programs to ensure they continue to provide essential services that are complementary to the work of GPs,” said Professor Keleher.

“In a submission on the current proposal, PHAA calls on the Government to ensure that Medicare Locals are comprehensive enough in both their functions and governance to provide an appropriate emphasis across the full spectrum of primary health care, and to provide services in a fair and equitable way,” said Michael Moore, PHAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

“The submission outlines 9 key recommendations in relation to the issues raised in the current proposal. PHAA is hopeful the recommendations will inform the Government’s health reform agenda and provide assistance in taking steps to improve the health outcomes of the Australian community,” said Mr Moore.

A copy of PHAA’s submission on the Medicare Locals Discussion Paper is available on the PHAA website at:
www.phaa.net.au .

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