Dear Mark

The Public Health Association of Australia Immunisation Special Interest Group is writing to express concerns regarding the ongoing Immunisation Program support for immunisation providers following the closure of Medicare Locals on June 30th 2015.

The National Health Survey of Children’s immunisations in 1989-1990 suggested that only about 53% of Australian children were adequately immunised. This alarming low coverage prompted a series of strategies including the establishment of Divisions of General Practice in 1992, the 1993 National Immunisation Strategy, the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register in 1996 and the Immunisation Australia Program and 7 Point Plan in 1997 to name a few.

These strategies and the establishment of the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register in January 1996 have assisted in the rise in immunisation rates and the improvement of immunisation data collection and reporting. The low incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) in Australia attests to the effectiveness of previous government infrastructure and implementation of successful initiatives including robust immunisation services, programs, program support and policies.

Local Immunisation Program Coordinators initially from the Divisions of General Practice and more recently from the Medicare Local network have provided substantial amounts of quality immunisation education and face to face Practice level support to GP’s, nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers. They have provided community information sessions and developed resources to empower consumers and raise awareness of the importance of immunisation and the timeliness of immunisation. Immunisation Program Coordinators have significantly contributed to the steady rise in immunisation rates through mentoring new staff, assisting providers with immunisation data cleaning, establishing effective recall/reminder systems and facilitating immunisation policy development within General Practice.

Since the introduction of Immunisation Program support, childhood immunisation coverage has increased dramatically. According to the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, as at 31st March 2014, 90.9% of children aged 12 – 15 months, 92.6% of children aged 24 – 27 months and 91.9% of children aged 60 – 63 months were assessed as fully immunised. The PHAA Immunisation Special Interest Group believes immunisation rates are at risk of declining if dedicated Immunisation Program Coordinators are not an integral part of the proposed Primary Health Networks to offer ongoing Practice based support to immunisation providers.

The PHAA, and in particular, the Immunisation Special Interest Group requests fully funded Immunisation Program Coordinator positions be included in the proposed Primary Health Networks due to commence in July 2015.

Yours sincerely

Angela Newbound  Michelle Wills  Michael Moore
Co-convenor  Co-convenor  Chief Executive Officer
Immunisation SIG  Immunisation SIG  Public Health Association of Australia