

MEDIA RELEASE

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General practice central to reform

Tasmania's ongoing battle with chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and respiratory illness is best fought with a focus on general practice care, General Practice Tasmania spokesperson Dr Geoff Chapman told Prime Minister Kevin Rudd this morning.

Dr Chapman, who participated in a round table discussion with the PM as part of his national consultation on health reform in Hobart today (13 October), said his message was to build on what worked well.

"The population of Tasmania is ageing and has the highest incidence of many chronic diseases and cancers across the country," he said.

"We are achieving good results for our chronically ill patients but it is essential that further investment is made in general practice and the broader primary care sector to address these problems.

"National and international evidence tells us that a health system oriented towards primary health care results in fewer hospitalisations and lower incidence of chronic illnesses which are threatening to overwhelm our system as it stands. General practice needs to remain at the centre of reform."

Dr Chapman said the network of Divisions of General Practice around Tasmania which worked to support general practice in the delivery of health care to communities should be further developed to create Primary Health Care Organisations.

"There is no need to reinvent the wheel," he said. "We have a network with strong relationships to general practice that has influenced change and improved practice that knows its community well."

General Practice Tasmania supports the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission's (NHHRC) suggestion to transfer policy and funding responsibility for all primary health care to the Federal Government, with the proviso that the change is managed well.

"Our State Minister for Health and Human Services, Lara Giddings, has raised concerns that the transfer of responsibilities might simply move the goal posts of the blame game between State and Federal Government. This is a genuine concern. It needs to be appropriately resourced and well managed," he said.

Dr Chapman supported the main arguments of the national reform agenda, particularly the shift in focus from hospitals to primary health care and general practice but warned that this should not be seen as a cost saving strategy. He also argued that without an electronic health record and further development and investment in eHealth in Australia much of the health reform agenda would be difficult to achieve.

"eHealth is essential. Not only so we can follow people through the system appropriately, helping them to manage their medications and their navigation through the system, but for population health data. Without data we are making educated guesses about our population and their health outcomes. Data is a key element of improving health care in this country," he said.

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The General Practice Tasmania network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

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