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MEDIA RELEASE

13 May 2014

REBUILDING PRIMARY CARE

Local communities will have better access to improved health services through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to be established by the Abbott Government.

PHNs will work to ensure services across the primary, community and specialist sectors work together.

A smaller number of PHNs will replace the Medicare Locals set up by the previous government to ensure health dollars are used more efficiently.

General practice will be at the centre of this model, and PHNs are expected to align more closely with state and territory health network arrangements to ensure effective working relationships, and reduce duplication of effort.

PHNs will be more locally relevant, accountable and responsive through local health professionals' involvement in Clinical Councils and consumer-led Community Advisory Committees.

To improve health outcomes, PHNs will work equally with both public and private providers to develop innovative health solutions for people living in their communities. They will also provide practice support to individual general practices to encourage high quality services.

Improved primary health care is fundamental to achieving better health outcomes across Australia.

A strong primary health care system helps to contain costs because health problems are treated before they need more expensive hospital treatment.

Primary health care is best positioned to manage chronic disease and support preventive health to ease pressure on the hospital system.

While there are some Medicare Locals providing good services, we want to ensure money is not wasted on administration. We want to ensure money can be moved to improve services.

The PHNs reflect the recommendations of a review into Medicare Locals, undertaken by former Chief Medical Officer, Professor John Horvath.

PHNs will be established following a tender process later in the year. Both public and private sector organisations will be able to apply and there will be a strong emphasis on minimising bureaucracy and red tape to ensure activities are focused on improving outcomes for patients.

PHNs will start operating from 1 July 2015. Medicare Locals will continue until then to ensure continuity for patients receiving services.

The Budget is part of the Government's Economic Action Strategy to build a strong, prosperous economy and a safe, secure Australia.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220