

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Important Community Health Services lost if Medicare Locals Close

The Australian Association of Social Workers is alarmed at suggestions that Medicare Locals may be abolished.

Three popular and successful programs that could be lost if Medicare Locals close are:

- ATAPS (Access to Allied Psychological Services) which provides targeted mental health services to people in need.
- Head Space which is an innovative service targeting young people's mental health, and
- Closing the Gap which is an important health strategy focusing on disadvantage.

Medicare Locals have been successful at consolidating community based programs into one population focused and efficient structure. This reduces infrastructure costs and ensures responsiveness to local health needs. Medicare Locals coordinate and engage allied health providers in comprehensive integrated health interventions with a view to reducing re-admission to expensive hospital beds.

Professor Karen Healy, President of the AASW, says that Medicare Locals develop strong multidisciplinary approaches to primary health care and are instrumental in bringing together state and commonwealth programs.

"Closing Medicare Locals just does not make any economic sense. Money saved will be lost many times over by preventable referrals to our overloaded hospital system," Professor Healy says.

"Why disband these important community managed organisations which are responding to local need and successfully consolidating state and commonwealth infrastructure and ensuring collaboration and integration of health based initiatives?"

The AASW proposes that the Government support these primary health care organisations to continue to develop and consolidate contemporary population needs based programs.

For exclusive interview requests with Professor Karen Healy or one of our professional social work members, please contact Stephen Brand, Senior Manager, Social Policy & Mental Health

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