



# Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**      26 May 2013

### **Improvements to primary health care at risk if Medicare Locals Abolished**

A coalition of 30 leading health groups, the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) is highly concerned that the Coalition's announcement that they will review Medicare Locals may mean they are intending to scrap them after the next election.

Across Australia, 61 Medicare Locals are playing a vital role in working towards ensuring all Australians can access health care in their local communities. They are supporting doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dental professionals and allied health workers to link together to deliver higher quality, better coordinated care to patients. Despite these organisations being only 18 months old on average (some less than 12) there are already many examples of improvements.

"Regional Medicare Locals are the only bodies across Australia mandated to improve vital community-based primary health care. Historically, we know that despite the good work of many highly committed professionals, the system has been poorly coordinated, access has been poor in many areas and care alarmingly fragmented for consumers," AHCRA Chair, Tony McBride, said today. "Necessary changes, for example making care more equitably available to all areas (especially rural and remote) and to population groups in need (eg people with mental illness or intellectual disabilities) won't happen unless they are driven at a regional level. Medicare Locals are those drivers."

"Many have created more accessible after-hours GP service systems (including for homeless people in Brisbane); linked professionals to work more effectively together as teams in consumers' interests (Hunter); created specific programs (eg Bubba's Business for young Indigenous pregnant women in Townsville); and provided a wide range of specialist nursing care for people with specific needs ( eg in Murrumbidgee around Parkinson's).

Carole Taylor, CEO of CRANApus, based in Alice Springs, highlighted the essential role of Medicare Locals in rural and remote areas. "Medicare Locals are especially important in remote Australia which has a higher burden of disease, a resource poor environment and the constraints of the health workforce maldistribution."

"Governments need to strengthen Medicare Locals and give them the levers to drive improvements in primary care. Australia's ageing population is adding to the rise in chronic diseases and an increase in overall health care costs. International evidence shows that a stronger primary health care sector is a key to increasing the population's health status and reducing overall health care costs. Strengthening primary health care will reduce pressure on our already-stressed hospital

system by keeping people healthier and out of hospital for longer. Medicare Locals are starting to do that.” Ms Taylor added.

“AHCRA calls on both major parties to commit to ongoing funding for Medicare Locals as a key part of a strong and responsive primary health care system for Australia’s future,” Mr McBride concluded.

*\* AHCRA advocates for a fairer health system. It is a coalition of some 30 national and state peak health groups, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, rural and remote health and consumer groups.*

***This is one of a series of media releases on the key health issues that AHCRA believes need attention. In the buildup to the coming election AHCRA is seeking commitment to the necessary action from the major parties.***

**Available for interview**

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