

MEDIA RELEASE

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GIPPSLAND MEDICARE LOCAL GETS GREEN LIGHT

The announcement that a Gippsland Medicare Local will be established from mid 2012 has been welcomed by local groups working towards its formation.

The three Gippsland Divisions of General Practice and numerous other interested parties from East, South and Central West Gippsland have developed the Gippsland Medicare Local model which the Federal Government announced would formally start from July 1 next year.

Formation of the Gippsland Medicare Local signals a major change in decision making and funding processes for all primary health care services delivered in Gippsland. The Gippsland Medicare Local will be responsible for coordinating the identification and prioritisation of health care needs for Gippsland communities.

GPA South Gippsland CEO, Rhett McLennan said: "The three divisions of general practice along with virtually all of those involved in primary health care in Gippsland have worked together over the past couple of years to develop a model which best suits this region. We are delighted the Federal Government has agreed with our proposal. In anticipation of that approval, a working group has been developing the appropriate steps and we will continue working together to ensure the Gippsland Medicare Local is ready to go in mid 2012."

Under the Federal Government's National Health Reform, Medicare Locals will coordinate and help plan the delivery of primary care activities. Primary care is effectively anything to do with health care, except for acute hospital services which will continue to be funded under the current arrangements.

"The role of the Gippsland Medicare Local will be to plan, coordinate, fund and oversee the implementation of services, other than public hospital services, across the region," Mr McLennan said.

Its focus will be on those services that are the first port of call for people when they first become unwell or require advice from a health professional, such as a doctor, physiotherapist or psychologist.

"Until now, the task of navigating various parts of the health system has been quite complex, which is the last thing people need when they are unwell. Our aim is to make it easier for patients to access the services they need, when and where they need them."

Examples include improving access to after hours GPs, local programs to combat obesity, diabetes support services, and referrals to local specialist services, including mental health.

"With all arms of the primary health care sector working together – from GPs, nurses, allied health professionals, and state and local government to Indigenous health organisations and local hospital networks – Gippsland Medicare Local will be able to better coordinate services and provide a more responsive, targeted and efficient service for patients."

To ensure appropriate industry and community input the structure of Gippsland Medicare Local includes the opportunity for involvement by members – that is anyone engaged in primary care services – to feed into a Board structure. The structure will include a Board of Governance supported by advisory committees in East Gippsland, South Gippsland and Central West Gippsland.

“Now that we have the formal approval and a start date, we will increase our industry and community engagement activities to encourage appropriate participation,” Mr McLennan said.